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No. 48.

The Wilderness

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY

H. V. ESMOND

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THE WILDERNESS

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY

H. V. ESMOND

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CHARACTERS.

Produced at the St. James's Theatre, London, 11th April, 1901.

SIR HARRY MILANOR.....	Mr. George Alexander.
LADY MILANOR, *his mother*.....	Miss Le Thiere.
ETHEL GLYNDON, *his cousin*.	Miss Dora Barton.
JOSEPH TREVOR, *his uncle*.....	Mr. H. H. Vincent.
THE HON. JACK KENNERLY.....	Mr. W. Grahame Browne.
LADY HONORIA PAWSON.....	Mrs. Edward Saker.
MR. GILBERT PAWSON, *her son*...	Mr. Lennox Pawle.
MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON	Miss M. Talbot.
MABEL, *her daughter*.....	Miss Eva Moore.
GRINSTEAD WORBURN, *a rich brewer*...	Mr. Edward Arthur.
HUGH GRAEME.....	Mr. C. Aubrey Smith.
EDITH CADOGAN.....	Miss Julie Opp.
HAROLD } *Mrs. Buckley Weston's twins.*	Master Vyvian Thomas.
MARJORIE }	Miss Phyllis Dare.
MISS ANSTRUTHER, *Ethel's aunt*..	Miss Henrietta Cowen.

ACT I.—THE NIGHT.

THE SCENE OF ACT I. is a fashionable afternoon tea-room in Bond Street.

ACT II.—THE DARK HOUR BEFORE THE DAWN.

THE SCENE OF ACT II. is a lonely spot in the Borcambe woods.

ACT III.—THE DAY.

THE SCENE OF ACT III. is the drawing-room in Sir Harry Milanor's house, Chesterfield Street, Mayfair.

THE WILDERNESS.

ACT I.

THE NIGHT.

SCENE.—*Fashionable tea-rooms in Bond Street. A large room at back opening on to balcony, overlooking the street. Near the centre of the stage an arch, and the lower tea-room, in the front. Tea-tables everywhere. A band somewhere at the back playing at intervals during the Act. The maids are smart, lady-like girls. At the table to the right, in the lower room nearest the audience, are seated* LADY HONORIA PAWSON *and her son* GILBERT PAWSON. LADY HONORIA *is a funereal remnant of past splendor. Her son* GILBERT *is about forty-five and has lived too well; he is short, fat and bilious. Two maids are in the act of setting tea and muffins before them when the curtain rises. Many of the tables are empty, a few are occupied; during the Act all the tables fill, and occasionally the chatter is so general that pauses occur in the principal dialogue.*

LADY H. (*ferreting a handkerchief out of a small bag at her large waist*) That was Sir Charles at the corner table.

MR. GILBERT. (*puffily eating*) No, it wasn't; it was Worburn the brewer.

LADY H. (*powdering her nose, then pulling her veil over it*) It wasn't; it was Sir Charles.

MR. GILBERT. It was Worburn. I lunched with him to-day.

LADY H. (*returning her handkerchief to her bag and shutting it with a snap*) It was Sir Charles. I bowed to him.

MR. GILBERT. Worburn don't mind, he's accustomed to it.

LADY H. I never forget a face. I've a royal memory. Gilbert, you're getting stouter.

MR. GILBERT. (*in a huff*) Whenever I disagree with you, you say I am stouter.

LADY H. Everything that disagrees with one makes one stouter.

MR. GILBERT. (*sadly contemplating his muffin*) Everything disagrees with me—but one must eat. Everybody does. (GRINSTEAD WORBURN *comes down from the upper room, evidently looking for some one. He is a man of about fifty, very cold and dignified in his manner—his costume rather suggests the stock period—he is more aristocratic in his manner and appearance than the oldest duke in the peerage.* MR. GILBERT *rises effusively*) My dear Worburn, we meet again—delightful lunch you gave us. May I present you to my mother? (*he does so*)

WORBURN. (*gravely*) My dear Lady Pawson, I'm so glad. I had heard you were indisposed—east wind, purely east wind—it affects even me.

LADY H. I have heard so much of you from Gilbert lately, that I positively recognized you as I came in. (*her son is a little staggered by her tact and untruthfulness*)

WORBURN. (*bows slightly—then moves a little apologetically*) I have a few young people to entertain this afternoon; but, like most young people, I fear they have no notion of punctuality. I am now wondering whether by any chance they are waiting for me in the rooms below.

LADY H. My dear Mr. Worburn, find them by all means; don't let us detain you.

WORBURN. (*gravely*) Thank you, I hope to see you on my return. (*he bows, and goes up*)

LADY H. A brewer! Surely a Queen's Counsel?

MR. GILBERT. (*sadly*) A brewer, and a most immoral one, owns most of the shares in a certain theatre and—gets his money's worth.

LADY H. Why don't you tell me more about these people?

MR. GILBERT. It's so dull to talk about other people when one's present oneself; besides, one couldn't discuss Worburn thoroughly with one's mother, he really is so cold-blooded.

LADY H. Shocking!

MR. GILBERT. It's all right, he's decided to marry and settle down at last. (*he turns to a passing maid*) I have no spoon.

MAID. I beg your pardon, sir. (*she gives him one*)

LADY H. (*eating her muffin*) Who's he going to marry?

MR. GILBERT. Oh, anybody! I don't think he's made up his mind. He's making 'em all show their paces—that's one advantage in being a millionaire, they're all ready to do it. (*he passes his mother the muffins*) Won't you? (MABEL BUCKLEY WESTON *is seen in the upper room; she*

hurries down to the left table in the lower room and seats herself behind it. She is an exceedingly beautiful girl about eighteen, and appears happily excited and flushed. The HON. JACK KENNERLY *joins her and sits left of her, first helping her to remove her cloak. He is a smart young man about town, of about five-and-twenty)*

JACK. It's all right, they didn't see us!

MABEL. Thank the fates, old Worburn's as blind as a bat. Oh, Jack, what a ripping day we have had!

JACK. We've been jolly lucky too, considering we haven't been spotted once.

MABEL. (*with a long drawn breath*) Oh, if one could only go on doing what one shouldn't all one's life, wouldn't it be exciting!

JACK. (*doubtfully*) Um'm!

MABEL. Where are the muffins? Oh, Jack, doesn't it run to muffins?

JACK. (*looking at dish*) Aren't they—how silly of 'em. I ordered 'em. (*the muffins are brought*) Oh, here they are. Cut into 'em, Mab. If we don't clear out of this before the afternoon gang arrives we're bound to be spotted. (MABEL *pours out the tea*)

MABEL. As soon as I'm fortified by tea, I shall be ready to face even mamma.

JACK. Thanks, I shan't.

MABEL. (*puts down her cup and gives a long sigh*) Oh, Jack, do you realize that this is absolutely the last time we can do this sort of thing?

JACK. Oh, one never knows.

MABEL. *I* know. My future is looming very obviously just now, and tête-à-tête teas with a detrimental must take a back seat. Oh, Jack, I'm so glad you're a detrimental, and needn't be taken seriously; you're really just as useful as a brother and much more exciting.

JACK. (*laughs a little*) I'm glad. (*then gloomily*) I say, do you really want to go to the Aquarium? (MABEL *nods her head vehemently, her mouth being full of muffin*) But it's a deadly place in the afternoon.

MABEL. The deadlier the better; it's our last day of freedom, so let's finish it off feeling fearfully tomby.

JACK. Ranelagh's more fun.

MABEL. Jack, don't be silly. Harry's sure to be there. A nice thing for me if he saw me alone with you. All mamma's castles in the air would topple on top of her.

JACK. It's all very well to pretend that it's only your mother who builds castles upon Sir Harry. You do a bit of building on your own.

MABEL. (*making a little grimace*) I know I do. I've got to marry him for heaps of reasons. Firstly, he's the richest man in the market just now; secondly—well,

that's all; secondly is the same as firstly, and so's thirdly.

JACK. You mercenary little devil!

MABEL. Am I? (*a pause—then rather sadly*) No, I'm not really! It's only a part of what mamma calls the great social scheme. We're all parts of a great social scheme, Jack—you're a part, I'm a part. Fat old Worburn's a part—these girls that wait on us are a part, only I suppose they failed in their parts, so that's why they have to wait on the other parts. (*then she tosses her head as if to shake off unpleasant thoughts—and turns in her chair, looking round the room*) I wish they'd play the "Belle of New York." (*she turns back and meets* JACK'S *glance. So they remain for an instant*) Jack, don't look at me as if you didn't know me.

JACK. (*gravely*) I wonder, do I?

MABEL. Don't you?

JACK. You're ready to marry a man for his money?

MABEL. Of course I am. (*she laughs*) What else is there for a girl to do if she doesn't? Spend her days carrying muffins to the old woman in that corner? No, thank you. Jack, I've been well brought up, so I know now that it's a girl's first duty to marry money, money with position if possible, but money anyhow.

JACK. It's beastly!

MABEL. Is it—how?

JACK. Oh, I can't explain.

MABEL. Well, anyhow, whatever it is—it's what's drummed into us from the word go. It's all part of the great social scheme. It's our one outlook. No, there are others: be a governess—I don't want to. Go on the stage—I'm much too good an actress to have a chance on the stage. No, Jack, if you were a girl you'd be told it from morning till night, *marry well*. Mind you marry well, it's everything; and so you see, rightly or wrongly, we begin to believe it at last, and we jump at £10,000 a year. (*then she leans a little towards him, half closing her eyes in a smile*) But the scheme has its compensations, it makes us enjoy a day like to-day, doesn't it, Jack?

JACK. I s'pose so.

MABEL. Dear old Jack, may I have another muffin? There's not enough butter on this. (*more muffins, which she really doesn't want, are set before her—then she becomes a trifle pensive*) And when I'm married to Sir Harry you'll come and stay with us often, won't you, and cheer me up?

JACK. Do you think you'll want cheering up?

MABEL. Oh, I expect so. Most of the girls who marry well seem to be able to do with a lot of cheering up.

JACK. Is that part of the scheme too?

MABEL. I suppose so.

JACK. I'm rather glad I'm not a girl.

MABEL. So am I, Jack. (*there's a pause—he fiddles with his cup, and her eyes rove round the room*)

JACK. (*suddenly*) In this scheme, doesn't it strike you that something has been left out?

MABEL. What?

JACK. Well, there's a curious, somewhat old-fashioned emotion that crops up sometimes even in modern life.

MABEL. What's that?

JACK. Love.

MABEL. (*bursts into a little laugh of surprise*) Of course, we've left that out! How could one have a workable scheme with love in it? No scheme would hold together for a minute.

JACK. I see—so you ignore it.

MABEL. One can't afford to waste one's time on love nowadays. Life's much too serious a problem. Love's all very well when one's quite young, but one can't let it stand in the way of tangible things, can one?

JACK. No, I suppose not.

MABEL. I think, personally, that love would die out altogether if it weren't for the prolificosity of the modern novelist.

JACK. (*sarcastically*) You know more about it than I do, you're eighteen.

MABEL. (*quite lightly—putting on her gloves*) No, I don't really know anything about it—it's not one of my subjects. I've always let that sort of thing slide.

JACK. Some day it may enter into your head to take it up.

MABEL. Well, when I do, Jack, you shall teach me the rudiments.

JACK. That's a bargain. You won't find it half so dull a thing as you imagine.

MABEL. Shan't I? Perhaps not. But I'm not going to think about it now.

JACK. I wonder what Milanor's views on the subject of love are.

MABEL. Oh! I hope to goodness he hasn't got any. I—I'm afraid I should laugh if he began to get romantic, and that would be awful, wouldn't it?

JACK. You'd never be my Lady Milanor then.

MABEL. Oh, never, and I'd never be mistress of that lovely place in Derbyshire with that divine trout stream.

JACK. Or the little house in Chesterfield Street with the green shutters.

MABEL. I've quite made up my mind to do away with those shutters. Oh, you will dine with us often and often, won't you, Jack?

JACK. Perhaps Milanor won't approve.

MABEL. Oh, he'll have to—because a girl marries it doesn't mean that she gives up her old friends.

JACK. It'll be an awful sell for you, Mab, if he doesn't come up to the scratch.

MABEL. Awful. Oh, but he will. It's not really difficult to convince a man he's in love with you, it only requires plenty of concentration. Watch his moods and fall in with them,—if he's sentimental, sigh with him ; if he's cheerful, keep him in the sunshine. Jack, you should watch me at work—it's really very instructive, and then, of course, mamma is very useful. I'm not fearfully fond of mamma, but I must say she's a good manager. What do you think she's done ?

JACK. What ?

MABEL. She's rented that cottage under the hill—you know, just on the corner of his moor—for three months, so you see I shouldn't be surprised if he and I didn't frequently run up against each other this summer.

JACK. Ah !

MABEL. He's awfully fond of rambling about the country alone—and—and I feel a tendency towards that sort of thing myself.

JACK. Well, of course that does help to clear the ground a bit, doesn't it ?

MABEL. Decidedly.

WORBURN *reappears in the upper room with a party of ladies, among them* ETHEL GLYNDON, *a sweet-looking girl of about seventeen, and her aunt,* MISS ANSTRUTHER, *a plump, cheery little woman of forty.*

WORBURN. (*motioning them all to their seats with grave dignity*) I secured this table—it—it is near the band.

MISS ANSTRUTHER. Sweet of you !

WORBURN. (*to* ETHEL) Miss Glyndon, will you be comfortable ?

ETHEL. I'm always comfortable anywhere. (*and they all sit down, out of sight of the audience*)

MR. GILBERT. (*to his mother*) I have not experienced that curious sense of fulness nearly so acutely to-day.

LADY H. The muffins were better done. I ordered the carriage to come, it should be here. Are you ready to move ?

MR. GILBERT. I would prefer to sit quite still for fifteen minutes.

LADY H. Perhaps it would be wiser. (*they relapse into inertia*)

JACK. I wish you'd fixed on anybody but Milanor.

MABEL. Why ?

JACK. I don't know. He's such an odd sort of chap—always doing such rum things. He's just been and en-

dowed a hospital for children; that strikes me as rather snobbish.

MABEL. I don't see that.

JACK. Oh, because a man's rich he needn't shove it down your throat like that.

MABEL. (*lightly*) I think it's very nice of him, it's better than throwing away your money on a horse.

JACK. Oh, I don't know. One's usual, the other isn't. Everything that attracts attention is bound to be bad form. Anyhow—he's putting on flesh.

MABEL. I shall have to check that if possible. I'm afraid you'll have to make the best of it, Jack. Mamma and I have agreed to him, so it's no good going back. Mamma tried to persuade me to consider old Worburn—but Worburn! (*she grimaces*)—there must be limits even to a social scheme.

EDITH CADOGAN *comes through the rooms, looking about her, followed by an aimless middle-aged lady. She sees* MABEL *and comes down.*

EDITH. Hullo! Mabel—and Jack—and no chaperon! What's the meaning of this?

MABEL. Jack and I are out on the razzle.

EDITH. I'd better have tea with you for propriety's sake.

JACK. I don't think it matters in our case—we're too young.

MABEL. Besides, we're cousins.

EDITH. Have you seen Sir Harry?

MABEL. He's at Ranelagh.

EDITH. He isn't—at least his mother told me she was going to meet him here at four. Mab, you look worried.

MABEL. What at?

EDITH. I don't know if you don't.

MABEL. I'm not worried—thank you.

EDITH. Mab, will you tell me the truth if I ask you?

MABEL. It depends.

EDITH. Are you to be congratulated?

MABEL. No, I'm not—there's a chance for everybody, you see. (*laughs and shrugs her shoulders*)

EDITH. There's none for me—we're much too friendly—you see, he's my trustee. (*she turns and looks round the rooms*) I hate this band, don't you? I—there's Mr. Graeme. We're tea-ing with him this afternoon—pity me! And Julia is with me, and she positively hasn't an idea outside window-boxes. But I say, before I go—I do think you two are silly to come here like this. Of course, I know it means nothing, but—but people *will* talk. There's Julia, for instance. Oh, Mab, what is the good of

all the eloquence I wasted on you when you came to Miss Grand's in Chill Street! Good-bye. (*she saunters up*)

JACK. Who's Miss Grand?

MABEL. I went to school there, with her—she's ages older than I am, and was always telling me things. I hate her—rather. She wanted to marry Sir Harry, and it didn't come off. So I suppose she hates me—rather.

JACK. Because it will come off?

MABEL. Oh, I daresay—don't talk about it. It seems different when she's about. She makes me think of what things are really, and that makes one feel beastly. Don't let's think at all, Jack. It's the only way to be happy. I say, this place is beginning to fill up. Hadn't we better make a move? Shall I pay, or have you got enough?

JACK. Oh, I daresay I can manage it.

MABEL. (*suddenly wheeling round*) Heavens, Jack! Is this the twenty-fourth?

JACK. Yes.

MABEL. Oh, and I've promised to fetch the twins and bring them here to meet mamma at half-past four.

JACK. That'll spoil our afternoon.

MABEL. No it won't. I'll bring them here, and I can easily make an excuse to mother and meet you anywhere—I've got till seven, then I must get back to dress. Sir Harry is dining with us to-night, and——

JACK. And you fancy——

MABEL. Never mind what I fancy. What time is it?

JACK. Five past four.

MABEL. I must go for them in ten minutes. Where shall we meet afterwards?

JACK. You wanted to go to the Aquarium.

MABEL. Nobody ever goes there, that's why. Well, anyhow—— (*she stops suddenly, looking into the other room, then turns and faces him with a gasp*) Jack, the worst has happened. Edith was right, he's here.

JACK. Who?

MABEL. Harry! (*they stare at each other for an instant, then her presence of mind returns*) My gracious, I can't be found alone with you; we *must* have a chaperon. Jack, come and join those two old frumps.

JACK. (*aghast*) But I don't know 'em.

MABEL. (*vehemently*) Neither do I. What matter? Come and join them. (*she stops one of the waiting maids who is passing with tea*) What's that lady's name?

MAID. That's old Lady Pawson, miss, and her son, Mr. Gilbert Pawson. (MABEL *sweeps down towards* LADY PAWSON'S *table, with an outstretched hand and a sweet smile*)

MABEL. I really can't go without saying how-do-you-do, Lady Pawson. We haven't met since that delightful after-

noon. (*she turns to* MR. GILBERT *and shakes hands with him warmly*) How do you do? I hope your gout is better. (*the old lady and her son are deeply agitated.* MABEL *smiles at* MR. GILBERT)

MABEL. I'm afraid your mother doesn't remember me.

LADY H. (*not knowing her in the least*) Perfectly, my dear. How do you do?

MR. GILBERT. (*feebly*) My mother never forgets a face. She has a royal memory.

MABEL. (*sitting down at their table and making herself quite comfortable*) I'm waiting for mamma. But you know how dreadfully unpunctual she always is. Oh, didn't you have any muffins? You really ought to make an effort in the direction of muffins.

LADY H. Gilbert's digestion is very fluctuating.

MABEL. (*with an affectation of great concern*) Oh, don't say you've got to be careful still? I hoped that trouble had passed long ago. Why, you've suffered from that ever since——

MR. GILBERT. Last April twelve months.

MABEL. I remember mamma telling us about it at the time. (JACK *is hovering about the table much embarrassed.* MABEL *smiles in surprise at* LADY PAWSON) Don't you know Mr. Kennerly? Jack, I'm disappointed in you. I thought you knew everybody worth knowing. Lady Pawson, do let me introduce Mr. Jack Kennerly—Lady Pawson, Mr. Kennerly.

JACK. (*sitting down beside* GILBERT PAWSON) Awfully good place to meal in, this, don't you find? Jolly secluded, and all that, and yet you're always running up against people you know.

MR. GILBERT. My mother and I have not run up against anybody for—— Mother, you desire——

LADY H. (*making a brilliant effort to recover herself and remember somebody—snaps out at* MABEL) How's your aunt?

MABEL. (*ingenuously*) Which aunt?

LADY H. (*after a pause,* LADY PAWSON *retrieves herself*) Your dear aunt.

MABEL. (*with a sigh*) She's still on the wane, we fear.

LADY H. Ah, she was always delicate as a girl. (*a long and melancholy silence falls which* MABEL *thoroughly enjoys, then says, with another deep sigh*)

MABEL. Yes, and she never really got over that affair—you know.

MR. GILBERT. (*getting interested*) Dear me.

MABEL. (*to* MR. GILBERT) I always imagine there was something more in that than met the eye, don't you?

MR. GILBERT. Oh, I really——

MABEL. You wouldn't like to say so. That's sweet of you. You live up to your well-earned reputation for discretion—very wise, that's why you're always so popular. (MABEL *turns to say something to* JACK, *and old* LADY PAWSON *seizes the opportunity to gasp at her son*)

LADY H. Who are they?

MR. GILBERT. Don't know. Can't think.

LADY H. Take me away. (*she makes an effort to rise*)

MABEL. Oh, dear Lady Pawson, you will stay and see mamma? She won't be a moment, and she'd be so disappointed if she missed you.

SIR HARRY MILANOR *has been seen in the upper room, he now comes down to their table.*

SIR HARRY. How do you do, Miss Weston?

MABEL. (*looking up in surprise and giving him her hand with a bright smile of welcome*) Oh, how do you do? Fancy you coming to this out-of-the-way little corner. Lady Pawson, may I introduce Sir Harry Milanor? (*bows*) Mr. Gilbert Pawson, Sir Harry Milanor. (*bows*) We're all waiting for mamma, she's so fearfully late again, and Lady Pawson was almost giving her up in despair, weren't you?

LADY H. (*who is approaching a condition of mental pulp*) I—I surely was.

SIR HARRY. (*looking curiously at* JACK) Hullo, Kennerly—it is Kennerly, isn't it?

JACK. It is. How are you? (*they nod to each other smilingly*)

SIR HARRY. Fancy knocking up against you—and at a tea-fight too! (*then he turns brightly to the tea table, signing to one of the waiting maids*) I'm sure Lady Pawson can have some more tea—fresh tea. And muffins. Would you bring us—let's see, how many are we? One, two, three, five—and some hot muffins. (*as he gives the maid the order* LADY PAWSON *has another gasp at her son*)

LADY H. Who is he?

MR. GILBERT. I don't know.

LADY H. Take me away!

SIR HARRY. (*turning to* LADY PAWSON) I think you know my aunt, Lady Pawson.

LADY H. More aunts! Yes, of course, your dear aunt. She was always delicate as a girl. (*aside to her son*) Take me away! Something's gone wrong with my head. I positively don't remember anybody.

SIR HARRY. (*to* MABEL) How are the twins?

MABEL. Oh, they're splendid. I'm just off to fetch them from home now to meet mamma. As a matter of fact, I'd forgotten I'd promised to do it. Lady Pawson, did I tell you that lovely story of the twins? You remember the twins, Mr. Pawson?

MR. GILBERT. Dear creatures!

LADY H. (*aside to her son*) They've gone too. Take me away!

MABEL. Mamma had been awfully busy during the morning, and Harold didn't think he'd had half the attention he was—oh, here's the fresh tea—he was entitled to, and so—— (MR. GILBERT *waves his tea away*)

SIR HARRY. (*surprised*) No tea?

MABEL. (*very sympathetically*) He daren't, he's still a martyr to that dreadful dyspepsia. It's been incessant ever since July twelvemonth.

MR. GILBERT. April.

LADY H. (*having pulled herself together, rises unsteadily*) I—I fear I shan't be able to wait for your mother. I—I find this room too warm. Gilbert dear, the carriage is there, isn't it? (*a passing maid overhears the question*)

MAID. Your carriage has been waiting some minutes, Lady Pawson.

MR. GILBERT. Ah! (*they all rise*)

MABEL. Are you going?

LADY H. (*to her son*) I'm going to Dr. Crawley—it's something mental.

MABEL. In Harley Street? You pass our house.

MR. GILBERT. May we—— (*he is going to bid her farewell*)

MABEL. Drop me! Oh, would you! It would be very nice of you. You're sure I shan't be in the way?

MR. GILBERT. (*quite nonplussed*) Not in the least.

MABEL. It's awfully kind of you. Then I may bring them here in time after all. Good-bye, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. (*very gravely*) Until this evening.

MABEL. Oh yes, you're coming to dinner, aren't you? Good-bye. I shall be back with the twins in ten minutes, anyhow. I'm sure you'd like to see them.

SIR HARRY. I should. (MR. GILBERT *shakes hands with* SIR HARRY *and* JACK KENNERLY)

MABEL. Good-bye, Jack. You're off to keep your appointment, I suppose. Lady Pawson, what would you do if you had a cousin who declined to take you to the Academy because he had an appointment to meet a mysterious some one at the Westminster Aquarium? At the south entrance, too?

JACK. The mysterious some one is only a chap who wants to see the prize fight on the biograph.

MABEL. What time are you due there? (*she fixes* JACK'S *eye meaningly*)

JACK. (*looking at his watch*) Five fifteen.

MABEL. Oh, then, as an appointment of that sort is a serious matter, I'll say good-bye to you.

LADY H. Take me away! (ALL *to each other, with*

smiles and nods, "Good-bye," and MABEL *goes out chattering gaily to* MR. GILBERT *and* LADY PAWSON. JACK *hangs about for a moment, then crosses to the other table, picks up his gloves, and begins to put them on. The band is playing, and the various tea-tables have filled up with a fashionable throng. The chatter is getting louder)*

JACK. (*shortly*) Good-bye, Milanor.

SIR HARRY. Good-bye. (*and* JACK *goes up through the throng and out of the rooms.* SIR HARRY *sits staring at the carpet, drawing a pattern on it with his stick, then he looks up and all round him, and leans back in his chair with a sigh*) Why the devil does she always bolt whenever she meets me? (*to* MAID) My mother isn't by any chance in any of the other rooms, is she?

MAID. No, Sir Harry, she always has this table.

SIR HARRY. Yes, I thought she did.

Old LADY MILANOR *enters. She is about sixty-four, but the judicious use of dye and the powder puff has made her look at least seventy.*

LADY MILANOR. Oh, Harry, you're here. Are you early, or am I late?

SIR HARRY. (*rising*) Well, mother dear, we'll say I'm early.

LADY MILANOR. But, as a matter of fact, I'm late, you think. Well, well, there was a sale at Hampton's, and I could not get away from some lamp-shades—the most ridiculous reductions—positively giving them away.

SIR HARRY. My dear mother, what satisfaction do you get in buying things at less than their value?

LADY MILANOR. Harry, don't be a fool! If I had your means——

SIR HARRY. I wish to God you had!

LADY MILANOR. Don't fly in the face of Providence.

SIR HARRY. What right had Providence to saddle me with twenty thousand a year? (*the maids put a variety of things before* LADY MILANOR. *She waves them away*)

LADY MILANOR. No, not those—tea-cakes, please. You're an inveterate grumbler. What on earth would you have said, or done, for the matter of that, if you'd been a poor man?

SIR HARRY. (*slowly*) I should have had some friends and—and I should have known exactly how I stood, as regards my fellow man—and woman.

LADY MILANOR. I think you know pretty well, as it is. You're thirty-five, horribly wealthy, and unmarried. Considering those three facts, it's obvious that what *you* don't know really isn't worth knowing. What did you want to talk to me about to-day? I'm sorry I couldn't be at home.

I hate being at home. Do ask that band to play. What is it, Harry?

SIR HARRY. It's what you just said. I'm thirty-five, I've got twenty thousand a year, and I'm unmarried.

LADY MILANOR. Well, isn't it a blessed state?

SIR HARRY. No.

LADY MILANOR. What do you want to do?

SIR HARRY. Marry.

LADY MILANOR. Why don't you?

SIR HARRY. Because I've got twenty thousand a year.

LADY MILANOR. Oh, I see. "Love me for myself alone"—you've been reading poetry.

SIR HARRY. No, I've been through several London seasons.

LADY MILANOR. You want a tonic.

SIR HARRY. No, I want a home.

LADY MILANOR. Buy one.

SIR HARRY. That's the dread. I want to make one. Suppose I try, and find out, when it's too late, that it isn't hand-made at all.

LADY MILANOR. Machine-made articles flood the market now.

SIR HARRY. So I observe.

LADY MILANOR. Well, they serve their purpose.

SIR HARRY. They may, but their purpose isn't mine.

LADY MILANOR. My dear boy, marry to-morrow, and with your disposition and wealth no woman would be fool enough to allow you to realize that you weren't perfectly happy. Come, come, amuse me. I've been bored for days.

SIR HARRY. I wanted to talk to you seriously. I suppose it's no use.

LADY MILANOR. *(briskly)* Not a bit, in the afternoon. Come to Hanover Square, about eleven on Friday morning. I can talk seriously then, because I'm due at the dentist's at twelve. Do ask that band to stop playing. It quite takes my thoughts from my tea. I suppose all this rigmarole means that you think you're in love with some one.

SIR HARRY. I can trace several of the symptoms.

LADY MILANOR. You're thirty-five, so it's somebody quite young, I suppose?

SIR HARRY. Quite young.

LADY MILANOR. And somebody to whom you would appear in the light of a great "catch."

SIR HARRY. That's the devil of it.

LADY MILANOR. Well, it's everybody's duty to get married and be disillusioned. She's not on the stage, I suppose?

SIR HARRY. She is not on the stage.

LADY MILANOR. Then take a tonic, plenty of fresh air and exercise, and we'll go into the matter thoroughly on Friday morning—— This is perfectly dreadful tea. Who is she?

SIR HARRY. Do you know Mrs. Buckley Weston?

LADY MILANOR. Took in a paying guest before she married her second husband, and just managed to live in Bruton Street?

SIR HARRY. Yes.

LADY MILANOR. Buckley Weston would be far happier in West Kensington now the family is so numerous—twins, I believe. Her first husband, Mabel's father, was a dear.

SIR HARRY. Mabel takes after her father.

LADY MILANOR. He *would* play the cornet.

SIR HARRY. Mabel has no small vices.

LADY MILANOR. Then what first attracted you to her?

SIR HARRY. Don't think me a fool—but—but—I've watched her playing with the children.

LADY MILANOR. Ah! she's a clever girl.

SIR HARRY. She didn't know I was watching.

LADY MILANOR. A clever girl is always preparing for the unforeseen.

SIR HARRY. (*shrugs his shoulders despairingly*) Perhaps it *would* be better to postpone this conversation till Friday.

LADY MILANOR. Certainly, but you *would* talk.

SIR HARRY. (*he suddenly leans forward and faces her*) Mother, when you were young were you ever real?

LADY MILANOR. (*aghast*) Eh?

SIR HARRY. Or did everybody always go on like this?

LADY MILANOR. Like what? Is anything wrong?

SIR HARRY. Everything's wrong. Nobody has the courage to be natural—does the difference never strike you between you as you are now and you as you are when your maid draws the blinds in your bedroom in the morning?

LADY MILANOR. (*horrified*) Harry!

SIR HARRY. That's when you are yourself. What you are now is a creature of your own creating.

LADY MILANOR. You'd be exceedingly pleased and proud to walk down Bond Street with me as I am when my maid draws my blinds of a morning, wouldn't you, dear?

SIR HARRY. I don't see that Bond Street matters.

LADY MILANOR. You have obviously never seen a somewhat battered old lady of sixty-four sitting on the edge of her bed, realizing that it's time to get up and prepare for the amusements of the day.

SIR HARRY. It must be a pathetic picture.

LADY MILANOR. It is, for the first ten minutes, but it's

wonderful what a tactful maid can achieve. Be grateful, my dear boy, that we do hide our real selves from each other; if we didn't, somebody's popularity would be distinctly on the wane.

SIR HARRY. (*looks at her steadily for some time, then draws a deep breath and rises*) I shall go down to Derbyshire next Wednesday. I begin to feel I want fresh air.

LADY MILANOR. Ah! that's different; people can afford to be themselves when they're all by themselves in the country. Your poor dear father never dreamt of wearing his toupet whenever he was outside the four-mile radius. (*she shakes herself into shape and rises*) I'm going to talk to Lady Carruthers; I saw her nodding in the corner.

As she passes into the upper room she meets MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON, *a jaded, somewhat pompous-looking woman of forty.*

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. How do you do, Lady Milanor?

LADY MILANOR. How do, Mrs. Weston?

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Is my daughter here?

LADY MILANOR. Haven't seen her.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. She was to meet me here with the children. I'm taking them to—how do you do, Mr. Worburn? (LADY MILANOR *joins* LADY CARRUTHERS. MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON *disappears behind arch to another table. There's a burst of laughter from the upper room, and the little party at* WORBURN'S *table breaks up and moves towards the door, chattering cheerfully.* ETHEL, *as she goes, sees* SIR HARRY *and runs down to him with a glad cry and outstretched hands*)

ETHEL. Harry!

SIR HARRY. (*starting up*) Ethel—bless the girl—what are you doing here?

ETHEL. Aunt Gertrude and the Granger girls have been having tea with Mr. Worburn—and he's taking us all to the Opera to-night. (*she stops*) Oh, I forgot, you don't like him.

SIR HARRY. (*drily*) As I know all about him I occasionally have the pleasure of cutting him.

ETHEL. Harry, being your youngest first cousin, I can call you a crank without being rude. He's perfectly charming and——

SIR HARRY. And he's a millionaire.

ETHEL. Just so.

SIR HARRY. (*after a pause*) Heard from Phil lately?

ETHEL. (*looking swiftly up at him*) Yes—this morning.

SIR HARRY. Anything fresh?

ETHEL. (*shaking her head sadly*) Lord Headmount

told mamma he'd try his best to get him the appointment, but you know what that means.

SIR HARRY. Poor old Phil!

ETHEL. (*slowly*) Poor old Phil—poor old me. (*then a pause, and she shrugs her shoulders with a laugh*) Oh, Harry, what's the use of breaking one's heart in this world? Let's keep something to look forward to in the next.

SIR HARRY. Don't talk like that.

ETHEL. You goose, I didn't mean it.

SIR HARRY. (*looking at her gravely*) You love Phil, Ethel, you told me yourself you did.

ETHEL. (*shudders a little*) Don't, don't, it isn't kind of you.

WORBURN. (*from upper room*) Are you coming, Miss Glyndon?

ETHEL. (*brightly*) Are you waiting for me? I'm so sorry. Good-bye, old goose, good-bye. (*and she runs up and rejoins the others, and they go out.* SIR HARRY *stands motionless a minute, then draws a long breath*)

SIR HARRY. Yes, I'll get out of it for a bit, that's what I'll do. (*he starts up as a gaunt, gray-bearded, iron-faced man comes awkwardly towards him*) Uncle Jo, what the devil are you doing here?

UNCLE JO. Your man told me where you were—so here I am. (*he looks round at all the fashionable people in disgust*) What a hole!

SIR HARRY. Isn't it?

UNCLE JO. What goes on here?

SIR HARRY. Tea, and old women and—and other things.

UNCLE JO. Come out of it.

SIR HARRY. That's just what I've been making up my mind to do—get out of it altogether. Uncle Jo, will you come for a week's fishing to Derbyshire?

UNCLE JO. A week's fishing? I don't often take a holiday.

SIR HARRY. You can't afford to, you're so rich.

UNCLE JO. Next week?

SIR HARRY. Or sooner.

UNCLE JO. Next week.

SIR HARRY. Right. Come down there, just you and I, not another soul, and I'll show you life.

UNCLE JO. Any females?

SIR HARRY. Not a soul.

UNCLE JO. Any fish?

SIR HARRY. Shoals.

UNCLE JO. None of this?

SIR HARRY. Heaven forbid! Just real true life—we'll get out of this wilderness if only for ten days, put back our shoulders and breathe.

UNCLE JO. I want to see you on business.

SIR HARRY. To the lions with business. (MABEL *comes through the rooms leading the twins)* Look, do you see that girl?

UNCLE JO. Yes.

SIR HARRY. Isn't she glorious? (*he seizes his uncle's arm*) Uncle Jo, come away from this place. I'm sure that I'm falling in love.

MABEL. (*sweetly*) Still here, Sir Harry? I made sure you'd be gone by now.

SIR HARRY. I'm going at once.

MABEL. That looks as if I drove you away. (*sees her mother at table behind arch*) Oh, mamma, I'm so sorry I'm late. Here they are, and they're both going to be fearfully good.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. You're coming with us?

MABEL. No, I'm going home: I'm tired, I've got a headache. (SIR HARRY *is watching her. She turns towards him with a little sigh*)

SIR HARRY. A headache?

MABEL. It's nothing, only this hateful, ceaseless London racket. (*then she smiles sweetly upon him*) I'm glad you haven't gone. I thought you'd like to shake hands with the twins, because you won't see them for ages.

SIR HARRY. Are they going away?

MABEL. Yes, mamma's taken a little place in the country, and we're all going down for a change—away from all this sort of thing.

SIR HARRY. (*eagerly—bending towards her*) You too? Out of the wilderness into the light.

MABEL. Into the light, yes—into the light. (*they look at each other, then she says slowly and softly, still looking into his eyes*) We meet again this evening?

SIR HARRY. (*gravely*) This evening.

MABEL. (*suddenly*) What do you mean by "out of the wilderness into the light"?

SIR HARRY. I thought you understood.

MABEL. I thought I did too, but now somehow I wonder if my meaning joined with yours. I didn't fancy such thoughts ever came to men.

SIR HARRY. Perhaps you've never known a man—or I a woman. The precious "real" is well wrapped round.

MABEL. Don't the wraps unwind?

SIR HARRY. Not in the wilderness. The air's too cold.

MABEL. But out in the light?

SIR HARRY. Please God—some day—out in the light.

MABEL. (*looks straight into his eyes, and says very seriously and slowly, giving him her hand*) I—I'm glad you're dining with us to-night.

SIR HARRY. (*gravely*) Thank you. Till then—— (*they shake hands, and he goes up through the rooms and out*)

MABEL. (*after a pause, smiles to herself*) That's good. (*then she looks at her watch*) Half-past four. The south entrance at quarter-past five, I said. It's all right. I'm in plenty of time.

ACT II.

THE DARK HOUR BEFORE THE DAWN.

SCENE.—*A corner of the woods surrounding the Borcambe Valley. Large trees overhang on either side, while all around the undergrowth of bracken and bramble grows thickly—an impenetrable wall of green leaves and red berries. The clearing in the centre is thick mossy grass, undulating into mounds. There is a small break in the undergrowth at the back. In the centre of the clearing, the grass growing in the hollow between two mounds is of a lighter color and circular. There are also on either side minor breaks in the bracken through which the children can enter the sacred precincts by going down on their hands and knees. It is now the second of June, and about the middle of the day. when to the singing of birds the curtain rises. After a pause,* SIR HARRY *forces his way through the bushes, his hat on the back of his head, his necktie flying, his hands deep in the pockets of his shooting coat, the whole man brimful of the joy of life. He looks round at the scene and smiles. He is followed by* UNCLE JO, *who looks particularly grim and unimpressionable.*

SIR HARRY. (*beaming*) Now, didn't I tell you I'd take you somewhere where you could put your shoulders back and breathe? Didn't I tell you I'd show you a spot?

UNCLE JO. Is this it?

SIR HARRY. This is it.

UNCLE JO. (*shortly*) Oh!

SIR HARRY. (*not to be dashed*) I knew you'd like it. I discovered this place when I was a kid. I grew up on that mound, under these trees. I've known these ferns when they were ten feet high, and I fought my way through them despite the attacks of frogs and—and snakes and bears and elephants, and all the other mighty denizens of the forest—fought my way through 'em, yes, that's where I came. (*he points to a little break in the undergrowth*) That's the pass I stormed, till victory was mine, and the great peace of this space spread out before me, and I sat down under this mighty hill and looked around upon my kingdom. (*proudly*) My kingdom!

UNCLE JO. Very interesting.

SIR HARRY. Yes, isn't it? Look! Look! (*he points to the circular patch of grass in the centre*) The fairies' ring! Just as green, just as—— Uncle Jo, don't look at it in that sniffy way.

UNCLE JO. I shall look at it in my own way.

SIR HARRY. Well, y' know, the fairies won't like it, I'm jolly well sure they won't.

UNCLE JO. (*taking out his paper angrily*) Ugh!

SIR HARRY. You're very fidgetty, Uncle Jo. You asked me this morning with tears in your eyes to show you the spots where I used to play as a child, and because I allow you to look at 'em, you become sniffy.

UNCLE JO. I asked you to take me somewhere where I could smoke in peace without running the risk of meeting any females.

SIR HARRY. Well, it's done. Nobody knows of the existence of this spot except me. I ought really to have blindfolded you before I brought you here, and I almost fancy I should chloroform you before I take you away.

UNCLE JO. You're a fool.

SIR HARRY. Don't be so short with me, Uncle Jo. I'm really very fond of you when you're not short with me. Now, you make yourself comfortable against that mountain, and I'll make myself comfortable against this one, and we'll each smoke a cigar, think over our past lives, and forget that there's such a place as London, or such an abomination of desolation as a London season.

UNCLE JO. You told me there were to be no females —we're not here two days, when who should we meet but the Buckley Westons.

SIR HARRY. Coincidence. How was I to know they'd rented the cottage?

UNCLE JO. Ugh!

SIR HARRY. Personally I'm very glad, it's given me just the chance I wanted.

UNCLE JO. How?

SIR HARRY. (*softly, almost to himself*) I've seen a real woman at last.

UNCLE JO. I've seen too many.

SIR HARRY. I never saw one before, and I'm thirty-five. Perhaps it's my fault, I may have been blind. (*a pause*) Don't you think she's real?

UNCLE JO. Who?

SIR HARRY. Mabel Weston. (*they smoke in silence*) I like to think of her as I see her here, a wandering wild flower in a world of wild flowers. (*another pause*) There are no wild flowers in Bond Street; perhaps you haven't observed that fact.

UNCLE JO. (*waving paper*) Damn the gnats!

SIR HARRY. (*blandly*) Gnats now—gnats! there's

something very touching about gnats. (*and he wipes one out of his eye.* UNCLE JO *moves to a tree with a grunt*) Now, don't fidget and snort about, and don't dare to put your great hoof inside that ring; just come peacefully back and sit on your mountain if you please. Here are the matches for you. (*he tosses them to his uncle*) How old are you, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. (*lighting his cigar*) Sixty-five.

SIR HARRY. Well, are you as good a man as you were fifty-five years ago? (UNCLE JO *grunts fiercely*) It's no use grunting, you're not—you can't see as well now as you did then—I can't either. In those days these ferns were ten feet high at least—we've grown up, opened our eyes wider—and behold! the ferns are only three feet high—we've lost sight of seven feet of beautiful ferns, because we don't see as clearly as we did when we were eight years old.

UNCLE JO. If I had many walks with you, young man, I think I should do you a mischief.

SIR HARRY. Oh, no, you wouldn't—you like my conversation very much indeed really—you think it over while you're trying to go to sleep and it does you a lot of good. Look at that bird's nest; that bird's nest was there thirty years ago, I remember it perfectly, only it was miles and miles higher up the tree, or perhaps the tree was miles and miles taller, it was one or the other. Uncle Jo, don't you feel rather dozy?

UNCLE JO. No, I don't.

SIR HARRY. You don't! You are an odd old person, aren't you, Uncle Jo? (*a pause*) Uncle Jo, if you don't feel dozy—there used to be a rabbit-hole behind that oak tree, thirty years ago, with a rabbit in it; you might go and grub about and see if he's there still; if he is, you might tell him I'm here too, it'll interest him very much; we used to be very friendly, at least I used to be, he was rather retiring. (HARRY *is lying at full length on one of the mounds—his hands folded behind his head*) I'm not looking at you, Uncle Jo, but I know perfectly well that you're reading a paper—a financial paper, all about things that go up and down, aren't you, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. I am.

SIR HARRY. The fairies won't like it. I'm jolly well sure they won't, right on the top of their mountain too. Uncle Jo, it must be very hard on you being a moneygrub. Of all sorts of grubs, it must be worst to be a moneygrub; doesn't it make you very, very sad, being such a nasty sort of grub, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. No, it doesn't.

SIR HARRY. Your goloshes don't keep you dry while you're sitting down, Uncle Jo.

UNCLE JO. I'm aware of that, sir.

SIR HARRY. (*sleepily*) Dear old Uncle Jo!

UNCLE JO. I'll thank you not to Uncle Jo me quite so thoroughly.

SIR HARRY. Not—dear old Uncle Jo. (*a long pause*) Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. What?

SIR HARRY. You are said to be the shrewdest, as well as one of the wealthiest men on the Stock Exchange.

UNCLE JO. Ugh!

SIR HARRY. Is it true?

UNCLE JO. Quite.

SIR HARRY. Then why don't you give me some money for my hospital?

UNCLE JO. Ugh!

SIR HARRY. Won't you give me some, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. No.

SIR HARRY. Oh, don't say it off like that so quickly—think it over a little. Uncle Jo, won't you?

UNCLE JO. No.

SIR HARRY. You said you didn't like my keeping on saying Uncle Jo, didn't you, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. I did.

SIR HARRY. Well, if I promise I won't mention such a horrid thing as Uncle Jo—for—for—two hours, will you give me a thousand pounds?

UNCLE JO. No!

SIR HARRY. Oh, well, will you give me back my matches? (UNCLE JO *tosses them to him with a grunt*) Uncle Jo, have you noticed anything odd about me lately?

UNCLE JO. Nothing odder than usual.

SIR HARRY. I'm awfully in love. I'm glad you've not noticed it. Wouldn't it be awful, if when one had a real bad attack of love, one came out in spots? I think that's a very lucky thing about love.

UNCLE JO. Mabel?

SIR HARRY. Mabel. (*a pause*) And the dear thing won't even look at me. I thought there was hope ten days ago, but lately—Uncle Jo, do you know, she's been positively snubby? (*a pause*) I seem to be talking about this very lightly—but—don't you be deceived—that's only my safety-valve. (*a pause*) I've written a poem on her. (*a pause*) I don't mean I've written *on* her—I mean it's about her—would you like to hear it?

UNCLE JO. No!

SIR HARRY. I'm sorry for that—it might cheer you up. You are looking so grumpy, Uncle Jo.

UNCLE JO. Am I? (*a pause.* SIR HARRY *puffs away contentedly at his cigar, and* UNCLE JO *becomes immersed in finance*)

SIR HARRY. Uncle Jo, there's a lizard going along round that tree, I wonder where he's going. Where should you say he was going, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. To the devil, like most other young people!

SIR HARRY. The fairies won't like your language; I'm jolly well sure they won't. (*a pause*) Uncle Jo, do you see that sort of a tunnelly kind of hole, under those ferns?

UNCLE JO. Yes.

SIR HARRY. That's where I used to crawl through when I—oh, I forgot—I told you that before. (*a pause.* SIR HARRY *is looking at the hole—suddenly he sits up listening*) Do you hear that? (*he rises*) Come away, Uncle Jo. Le roi est mort, vive le roi! Come away! (*he seizes him*)

UNCLE JO. What the devil——

SIR HARRY. Hush, come away—we've no right here—we're only "grown-ups" now. Come away, the King and Queen are coming to their throne, come away. (*and he hurries* UNCLE JO *out through the bushes at the back, and forces him to hide behind a tree. After a pause a small golden head appears through the undergrowth, and* HAROLD *crawls solemnly on, followed by his twin sister* MARJORIE. *When they have successfully got through the brambles and ferns they turn and cautiously drag in after them a miniature barrow heavily laden with stores which they solemnly wheel to the centre of the glade.* HAROLD *then sits down on one side of the barrow and* MARJORIE *sits on the other, and they both simultaneously give vent to a sigh of satisfaction over labor nobly done, contemplating with triumph the contents of the barrow*)

HAROLD. We gotted 'em.

MARJORIE. I gotted the bones.

HAROLD. I *do* hope Puppy won't know who wented to his kennel when he was out.

MARJORIE. He won't—unless the fairies tells him.

HAROLD. Which they won't—'cos we only stoled 'em for them—let's put 'em on their table. (*they then proceed to remove the old bones from the barrow and put them into the fairies' ring*)

MARJORIE. This is a splendashious dinner for 'em, isn't it? (*she holds up the dusty remains of a haddock and surveys it with much admiration*) I specs they'll just love that.

HAROLD. I specs so. I gotted this from the dust-hole.

MARJORIE. I specs they'd like it better to have jam wiv it.

HAROLD. (*contemplating his sister with a reproachful sigh*) You etted up all your jam—you always does.

MARJORIE. (*solemnly*) I likes jam—'sides, jam's not

good for these sort of fairies—it's bones and yaddicks and sawdust they likes best.

HAROLD. How do you know?

MARJORIE. I—I must have yeard 'em say so. (*a pause*) Yes. I must 'ave.

HAROLD. (*sniffing at the dilapidated fish*) It's werry nice and smelly—this one is. (*he holds it out to* MARJORIE, *who sniffs it ecstatically*)

MARJORIE. Werry nice. I specs that's what 'tracts 'em. (*then follows a silence, during which they sniff dreamily at the haddock skin. Their joy is interrupted by the distant voice of* NURSE *calling through the trees*—"Master Harold! Miss Marjorie! where are you?")

HAROLD. (*after a scared pause—during which the two listen*) She mushn't know 'bout thish plache, mush she—we's the only people that know 'bout thish plache—no un else mus ever know.

MARJORIE. Cert'ny not. Come on.

HAROLD. (*pointing pensively to the haddock*) Marj—she's so sniffy—think she'll be able to sniff as far as to this?

MARJORIE. (*gloomily*) I specs so. (*and she crawls off*)

HAROLD. (*following* MARJORIE) I yope she won't, she's so very gyeedy, she won't leave none for ye poor little fairies. (*and they both solemnly disappear under the ferns, pushing the empty barrow before them*)

SIR HARRY. (*coming down*) It was beastly caddish of us to listen, but—but wasn't it beautiful, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. Children's talk!

SIR HARRY. I wish we didn't forget how to talk like that. What a selfish little brute I must have been when I was a child. I used to be very friendly with the fairies—but—but I used to think it was their business to do things for me, not me for them. It never struck me that they had appetites like other people. *I* never brought them luxuries on a barrow—did you, Uncle Jo?

UNCLE JO. No!

SIR HARRY. And such delicate dishes too. (*he gingerly picks up the haddock*) I think the new generation is a little in advance of the old. I must have long talks with that King and Queen—they—they'll do me good. (*and he reverently replaces the dilapidated fish-skin in the ring*)

UNCLE JO. You fail to observe that they are supplying their friends with other people's goods. The bones belong to the puppy, and the—that—whatever it is, is the perquisite of the dustman. That's the sort of generosity we are all quite ready to indulge in.

SIR HARRY. Uncle Jo, how did you get all the money you've got?

UNCLE JO. By hard work and keeping my eyes open.

SIR HARRY. That's how they got their treasure—this—and these bones.

UNCLE JO. Ugh!

SIR HARRY. But they've been beautiful and given their gains away.

UNCLE JO. Wise children!

SIR HARRY. Of course they are—but how about you? You've kept your haddock in your pocket and your bones under your pillow. It's very wrong of you, Uncle Jo, very wrong, and I'm not at all sure that it's healthy. (*pause*) Do you see the point?

UNCLE JO. Yes, but I don't mean to give you a thousand pounds, so that's all about it.

SIR HARRY. You do put things so concisely, Uncle Jo, that's why I'm so very fond of you.

UNCLE JO. (*with a grunt of disapproval*) You going to loll there all day?

SIR HARRY. I must have a serious talk to myself occasionally, you know.

UNCLE JO. Well, I'm going back.

SIR HARRY. Have another. (*offering cigar-case*)

UNCLE JO. No, thank you, this'll take me as far as the house. Good-bye for the present.

SIR HARRY. Good-bye! (UNCLE JO *disappears through trees at the back*)

SIR HARRY. (*makes himself quite comfortable*) Now I shouldn't be a bit surprised—if I didn't have just a little doze—nobody in the world knows where I am, except me. (EDITH CADOGAN'S *voice is heard talking to* UNCLE JO)

EDITH. It's very fortunate meeting you. I'll find him. (*and she pushes her way through the ferns*)

SIR HARRY. My gracious, it's Edith—what on earth are you doing here?

EDITH. I drove over with your mother and Hugh Graeme from the Hydro. I've brought you some more papers to go through.

SIR HARRY. Oh, lord, if anybody ever makes me a trustee again—I—I'll—— (*he waves politely to her*) Take a mound?

EDITH. (*looking down at him*) No, thank you.

SIR HARRY. How's mother?

EDITH. Blooming.

SIR HARRY. She going to be at the Hydro long?

EDITH. I don't know.

SIR HARRY. How did you find out this spot—nobody knows of it, except me.

EDITH. We ran into your uncle just this minute.

SIR HARRY. It's very careless of Uncle Jo, that's all I can say.

EDITH. Aren't you glad to see me?

SIR HARRY. No.

EDITH. Not a bit?

SIR HARRY. Not a bit.

EDITH. I don't believe you, Harry. You're very fond of me really, because I haven't thrown myself at your head as other girls have.

SIR HARRY. Oh!

EDITH. Your mother has been telling me this morning how very trying you find it—being so badgered. Why not give all your money away—to me, for instance—then perhaps some one who isn't too particular might—— (*she laughs down at him*) What is it? "Love you for yourself alone!"

SIR HARRY. I wish you'd go away.

EDITH. (*smiling*) You're a sentimental old darling, that's what you are. You will go through those papers for me, won't you?

SIR HARRY. Um!

EDITH. And send them back to me to-night?

SIR HARRY. Yes. (*she pulls a fern and sits beside him, then casually strokes his cheek with it*)

EDITH. (*softly*) Harry?

SIR HARRY. (*dozily*) Um!

EDITH. Is that all?

SIR HARRY. What more do you want?

EDITH. You never care to understand now—do you?

SIR HARRY. No.

EDITH. Do you remember the talks we used to have?

SIR HARRY. Christians, awake! What a question! Which talks—what about?

EDITH. About life—serious life.

SIR HARRY. Oh, lord, yes!

EDITH. We never have them now.

SIR HARRY. Who wants to repeat oneself?

EDITH. Would it be repeating oneself?

SIR HARRY. Wouldn't it? Besides, the facts aren't the same.

EDITH. You do remember the talks?

SIR HARRY. If you mean a serious talk I had with you at the Gordons' dance?

EDITH. (*sentimentally*) Out on the leads off the landing, under that shabby awning. You do remember?

SIR HARRY. Yes, you were engaged to Dick Rhodes, and for some odd reason you confided to me that you rather despised him.

EDITH. Well, I did as you wished—I broke it off next day.

SIR HARRY. (*sitting up*) As I wished! I like that;

what difference did it make to me? I said I thought you were a fool, or perhaps rather worse, to be engaged to be married to a man you "rather despised," that's all—and—and—you chucked him—no fool you.

EDITH. Do you know Hugh Graeme?

SIR HARRY. Yes—at school with him.

EDITH. What do you think of him?

SIR HARRY. Damn good chap. Not brainy—but damn good chap.

EDITH. He wants me to marry him!

SIR HARRY. Oh! Damn good chap, not brainy—but a damn good chap.

EDITH. I think I shall.

SIR HARRY. Ah!

EDITH. You haven't any advice to give me *now*, I suppose?

SIR HARRY. (*stretching himself lazily*) My dear girl—out on the leads—under a shabby awning—with an occasional star and a soothing band from the room below, one may let oneself drift into giving advice—but not here. We *live* here—we don't float about in darkness on a tune.

EDITH. (*shortly*) I shall marry him.

SIR HARRY. I should.

EDITH. Thank you.

HUGH. (*heard calling*) I say, Miss Cadogan?

EDITH. There he is.

SIR HARRY. Nice voice.

HUGH. Where are you?

EDITH. I'm coming.

HUGH. Oh! in there. (*he comes in. He is a heavily built man with a very large moustache*) Here you are. Lady Milanor is beginning to complain of cramp. Hullo, Milanor!

SIR HARRY. Hullo!

EDITH. Very well. (*she moves away brightly smiling*) I'll give your love to your mother, Harry, and so leave you, and seriously I'll take your advice this time.

SIR HARRY. Eh! (*she bends down and whispers*)

EDITH. I'll marry him.

SIR HARRY. I believe you will. What are some women made of? (*she laughs, and turns to* GRAEME *sweetly*) Let's go.

HUGH. (*crossing swiftly to* SIR HARRY) I say—has she told you?

SIR HARRY. What?

HUGH. That I want to——

SIR HARRY. Oh, yes.

HUGH. Wish you'd put in a good word.

SIR HARRY. I have.

HUGH. Awfully good of you—at one time she led me to

suppose that you—er—and of course you're so deuced rich that I knew if you did I'd have no earthly—but you don't.

SIR HARRY. Certainly not. I'm her trustee; it would be illegal.

HUGH. (*much impressed*) Oh, would it? I didn't know—I'm an awful ass really; people don't know it, but I am. Think she'll——?

SIR HARRY. Sure she'll—she said she would.

HUGH. (*delightedly*) Did she?

EDITH. (*from back calling*) Must I go alone, Hugh?

HUGH. Coming! (*and he dashes after her*)

SIR HARRY. What a nuisance they all are. If all this rabble keep on coming here the fairies won't like it—I'm jolly well sure they won't. (*his eyes rove lovingly round the scene, and at length come to a standstill at the sight of a note sticking out of a cleft in the trunk of a tree*) Well, I'm hanged if somebody hasn't written a note and stuck it up in that tree. How dare they do such a thing? How positively dare they? (*he gets up and approaches it gingerly*) Now, who put it there? It couldn't be the King—he's too small—or the Queen either. No, they couldn't have done it, not even by standing on each other's heads. The fairies wouldn't approve of this sort of thing —I'm jolly well sure they wouldn't. I'd better put a stop to it at once. (*he takes out the note and looks at it*) Not addressed to a single soul—this is very embarrassing—it may be meant for me—it must be meant for me—I'm the only person here. I—I hope it isn't important. (*he opens it and reads*) "If I'm a minute late I don't suppose I shall come at all."—Hm! concise. Now, I wonder who it's from and to, and how long it's been there. It's altogether really very odd. I think I'll put it back again. (*he does so*) Hullo, more people—somebody must have told everybody about this place. It isn't half such a cosy corner as it used to be when I was eight years old. (*he goes behind one of the bushes*) It's killed that rabbit; I'm jolly well sure it has. (*and down through the opening strolls the immaculate youth* JACK KENNERLY. *He comes to the tree and takes the note, opens it, reads it carelessly, tears it up, puts the pieces in his pocket, and proceeds to light a cigarette, remarking to himself after about the third puff*)

JACK. Well, if she thinks I'm going to kick my heels about here all day she's jolly well mistaken—my train goes at one fifty.

SIR HARRY. (*having recognized voice, says*) Hello, Kennerly!

JACK. Who the—— Hello! (*as* SIR HARRY *comes round the bush there is an awkard pause; it is obvious that* JACK *is not over glad to see* SIR HARRY)

SIR HARRY. (*contentedly sitting down against tree*) By gad, isn't it a beautiful day?

JACK. It is. (*another pause*)

SIR HARRY. Now, ye know, I can't help wondering to myself what brings you here.

JACK. I was wondering the same about you.

SIR HARRY. I belong here. I—I understand this place —you don't—you ought to keep on the gravel path, you ought indeed. You seem fidgetty, are you expecting any one?

JACK. No.

SIR HARRY. If she's a minute or two late she isn't coming at all—so I'm not in your way, am I?

JACK. Oh! you read it?

SIR HARRY. Yes. I thought somebody ought to read it. It—it looked as if it was just pining for a little attention.

JACK. There's a great charm about you, Milanor.

SIR HARRY. (*blandly*) Yes, there is, isn't there? Are you going to wait here much longer?

JACK. Yes.

SIR HARRY. Oh! then I think I'll go away.

JACK. Thank you.

SIR HARRY. Don't mention it. Is she pretty?

JACK. Yes.

SIR HARRY. Lucky man. (*he looks at* JACK *with a sigh*) You've no income, no prospects, nothing in the world but just yourself; and—and—"If she's a minute or two late, she isn't coming at all." (*a pause*) Kennerly, she means coming. Stand there waiting for her, if you have to wait a thousand years, it's worth it—she's coming just to see you. (*he goes away through trees—touching a berry here and a fern there as he goes*)

JACK. *to himself*) 'Pon my soul, I believe that fellow's mad. (*then he begins sniffing*) Fish! I smell bad fish. (*he sees the fish and the bones*) How the dickens did this filth get here? (*and he gingerly chucks it all away over the bushes. After a moment's pause* MABEL *comes quickly through the ferns, a little out of breath, but looking very sweet and happy*)

MABEL. Oh! I am so sorry, Jack, but I've been looking for the twins.

JACK. Lost again?

MABEL. Yes, they've been lost for half-an-hour.

JACK. They'll turn up.

MABEL. Oh yes, I hope so.

JACK. They can't climb the wall, and there's no pond for them to fall into, so they're sure to be all right.

MABEL. You think so?

JACK. Sure so—aren't you?

MABEL. Yes, I suppose I am.
JACK. Then we can have a minute or two all alone.
MABEL. Yes, if you're very good.
JACK. I'm always good.
MABEL. Pretty good?
JACK. (*softly*) Would you like me to be wicked?
MABEL. I don't know.
JACK. Would you like to experimentalize?
MABEL. (*looking at him*) No, I don't think so.
JACK. You seem doubtful.
MABEL. I'm not a bit.
JACK. (*getting a little nearer to her*) There's a horrible fascination in doing things you know are quite wrong.
MABEL. I know there is—that's why I'm here.
JACK. (*slowly, with a great deal of intention*) Do you mean that?
MABEL. What?
JACK. You know.
MABEL. I don't. (*their eyes meet, she shrinks a little from him*) What do you look at me like that for?
JACK. I—I'm awfully—head-over-ears in love with you.
MABEL. Does that make you look at me like that?
JACK. Yes!
MABEL. It isn't a nice look—it—it seems to have a lot behind it.
JACK. It has!
MABEL. I'm sorry I came.
JACK. That's not true—you—you know it isn't true! (*he bends quite close to her*)
MABEL. (*repulsing him*) No, I don't want you any nearer. (*a pause. He backs off, she sits on one of the mounds, her chin in her hands, and stares at him*) Jack, it's awfully curious, isn't it?
JACK. What is?
MABEL. Why, all this—the way we're going on now. Just fancy you and I being so silly after having known each other all these years!
JACK. It isn't being silly—it's being wise.
MABEL. We never dreamed of this sort of thing in London. What's happened? Both of us seem to be two people now, when we meet with other people about——
JACK. (*bending over her, interrupts softly*) There's no fun in that!
MABEL. I know there isn't now, that's the funny part, everything's so changed—but—but—when we're quite alone—and—and—together like this—it all gets so—so curious—it gets—gets as if it were dizzy—doesn't it? You don't seem to be a bit like you. You don't seem to be a bit like anybody real—you're just a—a—oh! I can't explain—and I seem to be—a—oh! not myself a bit—or—no

—yes—I am myself. I'm part of myself—but the part of me that I know and everybody else knows seems far away. It's awfully curious. I—I wonder why I came?

JACK. Because you couldn't help it.

MABEL. I won't come any more!

JACK. Yes, you will!

MABEL. No, I won't!

JACK. I love you, Mabel!

MABEL. Do you? (*a long pause*) I don't love you—at least, I don't think I do. No, I'm quite sure I don't—because, when I think you over, somehow it strikes me that you're quite ordinary, and if I loved you, you couldn't be ordinary, could you? (*then she breaks off, and says in a most matter-of-fact manner*) And, besides, I don't believe in love.

JACK. May I come and sit quite close to you? (*she doesn't answer, he comes quietly and stands beside her*) You're not really sorry you came?

MABEL. I am—and—I'm not—that's where it's so funny. (*he puts out his hand and gently touches her hair, then bends to kiss her, she shrinks from him*) No—don't—Jack—don't, please.

JACK. (*softly*) I kissed you before once, why mayn't I now? A kiss is such a little thing.

MABEL. It isn't—it—it's an awful thing—that kiss began it all.

JACK. Of course it did.

MABEL. Why should it be—be so unsettling to one? No—don't. (*she moves from him*) I'm serious about this—I thought you'd understand. (*then suddenly*) This is the last time I'm ever going to be alone with you, Jack. I made up my mind to that while I was coming here—you—you—you're not a good influence—you make me perturbed.

JACK. (*in a whisper*) Mab, there isn't a soul anywhere near us—we're all alone. God's beautiful sky, and the trees, and—and the soft grass—and—and—oh, everything that makes life beautiful; and, if I come and sit quite close to you, like this, and just put my arm round you, like this—and—oh! Mab, I may kiss you again, mayn't I?

MABEL. (*slowly*) No, Jack—don't. It—it's awfully wrong really. I've been in a sort of a cloud ever since that night, but—but—every time I see you now, I *know* that it all means nothing between you and me.

JACK. Why doesn't it? You liked it when I kissed you, didn't you?

MABEL. Yes, but I don't think that's quite the point. You didn't kiss me, you—you—kissed the *woman* in me—and—and—that kiss has made a difference. Don't, Jack—you mustn't do it again. (*this quite serious and slow*)

JACK. As you please. (*he saunters away*)

MABEL. Oh, Jack, if one could only understand what it all means!

JACK. (*with a laugh*) *I* can.

MABEL. Oh no, you can't, you can't at all, that's why it's so horrid. Why should you be able to unsettle me, when you can't really understand anything? You talk about "the sky and the trees"—but, oh, Jack, you—you—don't care a bit about them really—you—— (*then with a complete change she breaks off*) Oh, don't let's talk about this any more—let's go and look for the twins.

JACK. (*reproachfully*) Oh, I say, Mab, don't go on like this; it isn't as if we had all the morning, my beastly train goes at one fifty, and I shan't see you again for months.

MABEL. That's a good thing.

JACK. (*coming to her and holding out his arms*) Mab!

MABEL. Don't be silly, Jack—we'll forget this last ten days, and go back to where we were before.

JACK. We can't. I can't, and I'm sure you can't.

MABEL. I can. (*a long pause*) I am.

JACK. (*whispers*) Are you really, Mabel? (*she is sitting on the slope of the mound. He is kneeling close, and a little above her. As he speaks, he steals his hands round her throat, and turns her face up towards his, till their eyes meet in a long look. She shivers a little, but makes no resistance; as he bends his face nearer her, she whispers*)

MABEL. Don't, Jack—oh, don't—it's so awfully wrong. (*and their lips meet—then there is a long pause, during which he draws her closer to him. They become listless, she stares out in front of her. He takes her hand and strokes it gently with his own. She says slowly*) Where are we drifting, do you know, Jack?

JACK. I'm too happy to think.

MABEL. I *must* think. (*a pause*) Are you really happy, Jack?

JACK. Yes.

MABEL. Really and truly happy?

JACK. (*kissing her hands tenderly*) Really and truly.

MABEL. I'm not. I'm miserable—oh, so miserable! (*she flings herself away from him and lies on the mound, her face hidden in her hands*)

JACK. Mab! Mab!

MABEL. I—I'm beginning to understand. (*she gets up and walks towards the bushes at one side and pulls at the leaves; then after a pause, she says quietly*) Jack, you—you say you—love me?

JACK. (*softly*) You know I love you. (MABEL *bows her head a little, still pulling abstractedly at the leaves, passing them through and through her fingers*)

MABEL. Then you—you'd like to marry me? (*there is a pause—she realizes the silence—looks up quickly, and turns questioningly to him*) Why don't you answer?

JACK. (*slowly and a little lamely*) Of course I'd like to marry you.

MABEL. Why have you never said anything about it?

JACK. Oh, because—— (*he laughs lightly*)—it's impossible—it would be too absurd.

MABEL. (*stares at him in silence, then says quietly*) I don't quite understand that.

JACK. (*nervously*) Why, my dear girl, I've no money, you've no money. A pretty figure we should cut if we married.

MABEL. (*slowly*) "A pretty figure we should cut"—and yet you love me.

JACK. That's very different. I can't help loving you.

MABEL. But you can help marrying me, I see. How nice to have so much self-control! (*the two stand staring at each other, till he drops his eyes and kicks at the turf in embarrassment*) I'm glad I came out here to you to-day—you've steadied me. (*a pause. They look at each other curiously*) Do you know, during this last week, I've been seriously thinking of letting my chances of a brilliant future slip through my fingers?

JACK. Why?

MABEL. You. (*looking at him intently*) The new "you"—what you said and—and—did—made it seem suddenly wrong of me to marry him.

JACK. I didn't mean——

MABEL. (*interrupting sorrowfully*) You didn't mean anything, I know that now. Do you remember talking to me chaffingly in London about love, and telling me if ever I took up the subject you'd teach me the rudiments? I think you've done it, don't you? But the odd part is, that up to a minute ago, I had begun to think love too serious to be a game.

JACK. A minute ago?

MABEL. You made me understand that love is nothing really; you can take my hands, you can kiss me, shame me in my own eyes and your own, because you love me. What comes of it? (*she laughs a little*) "I've no money—you've no money. A pretty figure we should cut." Your own words, Jack, your own words, just think them over. You've brought me back again to common sense. No, no! Love may be very attractive, but marriage is more tangible. I'll marry Sir Harry and find my amusement in seeing how it turns out. (*she gives a hard little laugh and swings on her heel as if to go*)

JACK. You're angry with me?

MABEL. You're only a coward, that's all.

JACK. You're unjust. I should be a coward to marry you. I can give you nothing, he can give you everything. (*then passionately*) Oh, Mabel!

MABEL. (*checks him with a bitter little smile*) Don't worry yourself. I'm very grateful to you, Jack. But for you I might have made a fool of myself. As you love me so very dearly I promise you one thing. I'll write and let you know when the wedding day is fixed.

JACK. (*shortly*) Thank you! I suppose it will come off?

MABEL. Oh yes, with a little tact—I'm very young, but I've been well trained. (*then her voice breaks a little, and she turns and faces him, her lips quivering, her eyes filling with tears*) But look here, Jack; don't go on thinking you're in love and kissing people—it may be all right for you, but—but it's a little dangerous for the girl.

JACK. You mean——

MABEL. I mean—that—that—it very nearly made a difference to me.

JACK. (*coming to her*) What difference?

MABEL. It tempted me for a moment to think that perhaps there were things in life more important than making one of the biggest matches of the season.

SIR HARRY *comes down through the trees, is surprised at seeing* MABEL.

SIR HARRY. You! You!

MABEL. (*with a complete change of manner turns to* SIR HARRY *with a sunny smile*) I—I suppose we're trespassing, aren't we?

SIR HARRY. Not a bit. But how on earth did you discover this out-of-the-way corner of the world?

MABEL. I came here to meet Jack, because I thought we should be quite alone.

SIR HARRY. (*gravely*) I see! Then it is clearly my duty to remove myself.

MABEL. That doesn't follow. Jack and I have had a very serious talk, but we've said all we had to say—and—and it's over—and he has forgiven me.

SIR HARRY. (*looking from one to the other*) What had he to forgive?

MABEL. A great deal, hadn't you, Jack?

JACK. (*laughing*) A great deal—are you coming back to the house?

MABEL. No, I'm going to sit here and talk to Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. Seriously?

MABEL. I always talk seriously.

JACK. It's nearly lunch-time.

MABEL. I hate lunch! If I'm late, explain to mamma that I've lost myself in the woods with Sir Harry.

JACK. (*shortly*) I will. (*he strolls away. She laughs lightly as he moves, then calls after him*)

MABEL. I'll write to you as I promised, you ought to get the letter in two days. Good-bye.

JACK. Thanks! I shan't see you again then—my train goes at one fifty.

MABEL. So it does! Good-bye.

JACK. Good-bye. (*and he goes*)

SIR HARRY. (*looking at* MABEL, *who is lying against the mound; her hands clasped behind her head, looking up into the sky*) Why have you sent him away?

MABEL. I haven't. He just went.

SIR HARRY. Did I drive him away?

MABEL. No; he was going before you came.

SIR HARRY. I read the note you stuck in the tree.

MABEL. (*calmly*) Did you?

SIR HARRY. Have you been having a *very* serious talk?

MABEL. Very. Sir Harry, do all girls hate themselves as much as I hate myself?

SIR HARRY. Do you hate yourself?

MABEL. Awfully! So would you if you knew what I've done.

SIR HARRY. Should I? (*he comes a little towards her*) Tell me what you've done.

MABEL. (*slowly*) I'm afraid I've been flirting with Jack.

SIR HARRY. Have you?

MABEL. Yes, I think I must have been. I didn't mean to. I didn't know it was flirting, he says it was, and I expect he knows more about it than I do.

SIR HARRY. I shouldn't wonder.

MABEL. And then quite suddenly it all got serious, and —and so I wrote that note and came out here to—to tell him how sorry I was—and—and to ask him to forgive me. It's awful when a person asks you to marry them and you don't want to, and so have to say no. You've never been through that, have you?

SIR HARRY. Almost; you see I've twenty thousand a year.

MABEL. (*sitting up and facing him*) You mean—oh, how horrid for you! What fools women are—as if money mattered! (*she lies back again*) That's what made Jack so angry just now. He said I wouldn't marry him because he was poor. Why, one couldn't help marrying a man if one loved him, however poor he was, could one?

SIR HARRY. Poverty is a blessing sometimes.

MABEL. (*suddenly*) Oh, Sir Harry—Sir Harry—why is there such a thing as life? I wish to goodness I was a beetle!

SIR HARRY. (*smiling down at her*) What would you gain?

MABEL. (*wearily*) Nothing, I suppose—even beetles get trodden on at the finish. (*a pause, then she looks up at him suddenly, and says*) Did it strike you that I'd been flirting with Jack?

SIR HARRY. I've never seen you together.

MABEL. Haven't you? Oh, I suppose you haven't—but does it strike you as likely?

SIR HARRY. No.

MABEL. I'm sure I haven't been. Jack must have misunderstood me. Why, I've known Jack since he was a little boy. (*she sighs sentimentally*) Poor old Jack!

SIR HARRY. Poor old Jack!

MABEL. I hope it won't prevent our remaining friends.

SIR HARRY. I hope not.

MABEL. Well, I can't help it if it does, can I? Just fancy what it would be to marry any one one didn't love.

SIR HARRY. You talk very glibly of love. What do you know about it?

MABEL. Nothing. I only dream.

SIR HARRY. You have dreamt of love—tell me what "love" seems to you.

MABEL. (*a little at a loss*) Oh—a man——

SIR HARRY. Naturally.

MABEL. And, if you love him—it—means that—that you love him—that you—that you—oh—that you're able to be your real self when you are with him. That you—oh, I don't think I know really, anyhow, I can't put it into words. (*she turns on her shoulder, and looks up at him*) *You* tell *me* what *you* mean by "love."

SIR HARRY. When I was about your age, I think I must have had the same ideas about love that you have.

MABEL. You can't tell what ideas I have, because I couldn't think of the words to put them in, and tell you.

SIR HARRY. It doesn't want words to tell what your ideas of love are. He's a fairy prince. (*she makes an amused grimace to herself, then says sentimentally*)

MABEL. I shouldn't care if he was a beggar, so long as he was Love.

SIR HARRY. Wouldn't you really! (*then he moves towards her, with a laugh of delight*) Oh, what a treat it is to talk to you!

MABEL. You're making fun of me.

SIR HARRY. I'm not. I'm in deadly earnest. You've no idea what a treat it is to meet some one who wouldn't care a hang if you were a pauper. Now look here, let you and I be thoroughly ourselves and have a talk.

MABEL. (*falling into his mood at once*) Oh, if one

could always be oneself wouldn't it be splendid? But there are so few people who'd understand.

SIR HARRY. *I'd* understand.

MABEL. Yes, I think you would.

SIR HARRY. Then if you think that, you know I—I'm worth making a friend of.

MABEL. Yes, I know that too.

SIR HARRY. Then why have you avoided me so steadily these last ten days, won't you tell me? You can trust me. Remember we're both being thoroughly ourselves, so nothing we say matters. Why have you avoided me?

MABEL. Because (*very slowly*) I've got a friend—a girl friend—who, when she heard we were coming down to stay here, said it was "clever" of me—as you were a great catch.

SIR HARRY. (*with disgust*) Isn't it like them? Oh, how I hate my friends!

MABEL. So do I. That one especially.

SIR HARRY. And that's why you've——

MABEL. That's why. (*a pause*) Isn't it awful for you?

SIR HARRY. What?

MABEL. Being such a catch.

SIR HARRY. I've not been caught yet.

MABEL. You will be some day.

SIR HARRY. I keep my eyes open.

MABEL. What's the good of that? Love's eyes may be open, but Love is blind.

SIR HARRY. (*gently*) Not always. (*she rises and walks slowly to the centre and stands staring at the fairy ring. He watches her*)

MABEL. Do you know what that is?

SIR HARRY. What?

MABEL. (*pointing*) That.

SIR HARRY. That circle of pale grass?

MABEL. Yes.

SIR HARRY. (*watching her*) Bad turf, of course.

MABEL. No. (*very gravely*) That's the fairies' ring.

SIR HARRY. Is it really?

MABEL. Yes, really. And—they come here when the wicked people in the world are asleep, and solemnly dance round and round.

SIR HARRY. (*anxiously*) Do—do you like to believe that?

MABEL. (*gravely*) Yes.

SIR HARRY. Oh, Mabel, so do I. (*he seizes her hands and laughs delightedly*) I love to believe those things, they make life beautiful—what—what—oh, what a dear you are!

MABEL. Don't be foolish, Harry!

SIR HARRY. I—I can't help it. Tell me more about the fairies.

MABEL. You wouldn't care to hear.

SIR HARRY. Wouldn't care? Why—why—look here—I'll tell you something. Before you came I brought Uncle Jo here, and I told him all about 'em—and he didn't care a bit—he kept on reading his stuffy paper all about beastly money and—I told him the fairies wouldn't like it, but he went on just the same. Oh, I'm so glad we've had this talk—we might have been years before we got to know each other as well as we do now. (*the bell of the old church clock is heard faintly in the distance*)

MABEL. Half-past one. Oh, I must go.

SIR HARRY. Not yet. Oh, don't go yet. What does time matter? We've all our lives before us.

MABEL. You can do as you please. I can't. I'm only a girl—and stern duty——

SIR HARRY. Stern duty says stay here. Why, all our future may be at stake—we're here in the fairies' ring. (*she tries to move her hands from his*) No—no—don't—not yet. I—I've got a heap to say. You were talking of love just now—wondering—we both were—what it was. I'll tell you what it is—it's what I've got for you.

MABEL. Don't—don't——

SIR HARRY. I must. It—it isn't the stuff they write about in books—it's just "love." Mabel, we've both got to live our lives, and—oh, it's so hard to live one's life effectively alone, but if you'll take pity on me, join hands with me forever as we've joined hands now, what a chance we'd have, wouldn't we? Why, we could go back into the wilderness with perfect faith, trust and confidence—we could stand shoulder to shoulder and go through with everything without a fear. You're real—I'm real at last. Will you have me, Mabel, will you have me? (*then, with a cry, she flings herself from him, and throws herself sobbing upon the grass*)

MABEL. No—no—oh, don't! No! No!

SIR HARRY. (*going to her and kneeling in great distress*) My dear! My dear!

MABEL. Oh, don't! don't—go away!—I didn't think—I didn't mean——

SIR HARRY. Hush, dear, hush! Why, my little one—what is there so terrible in knowing that there is some one ready and willing to lay down his life for you? (*a long pause. She gets up and moves away, controlling herself*)

MABEL. I—I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be a fool. (*then she turns to him, and they look long into each other's eyes—till swiftly she flings out her arms to him with a cry—*

half sob, half laugh) Oh, Harry, Harry, if you were starving I'd marry you to-morrow.

SIR HARRY. (*very gravely*) You'll marry me this day month?

MABEL. Don't ask me to—oh, please don't ask me to. (*and he slowly draws her to him and kisses her. She stands passive and submissive, and as he releases her she sinks again to the ground and buries her face in her hands*)

SIR HARRY. (*after a pause, raises her very tenderly—holds her at arm's length, looking at her proudly*) My wife! (*then he whispers, bending towards her*) What have you got to say?

MABEL. (*slowly*) Nothing — nothing at all, except that—(*with a little sob*) I—I'm very tired.

SIR HARRY. (*tenderly*) Poor dear. (*he puts his arm round her. They turn to go. As they reach the opening in the trees he stops and looks down*) A violet!

MABEL. (*quickly*) Don't—don't pick that.

SIR HARRY. (*looking up at her*) I wasn't going to, really. (*he smiles happily*) Oh, isn't it all good? (*then he lifts his head and stands for a moment listening*) Hush, come away. (*they back off behind the tree as the golden heads appear through the bushes and the twins solemnly toddle to the fairy ring and contemplate it gravely*)

HAROLD. They've etted up the yaddick. I knowed they was hungry.

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

THE DAY.

SCENE.—*A very comfortable home room, half library, half drawing-room. A big fire burning. In front of it, in a big arm-chair,* SIR HARRY *lying reading a book. At a table not far off* MABEL *sitting working. The curtain rises and then a long silence, no movement.*

SIR HARRY. (*suddenly looking up from his book*) Sweetheart!

MABEL. (*quietly*) Yes?

SIR HARRY. Edith and Hugh are coming in about nine, they're in a fix over some business or other.

MABEL. Poor Edith!

SIR HARRY. Poor *me!* I'll never be a trustee again, as long as I live. (*he goes on reading. Another long*

pause. She rises and comes and stands beside him—puts her hand on his head. He puts his hand up and takes hers)

SIR HARRY. (*softly*) Dear old sweet! I feel awfully dozy—play something. (MABEL *goes to piano and plays, and* SIR HARRY *continues dreamily*) Life's a beautiful thing when it goes straight, don't you think so?

MABEL. Beautiful. (*she leaves the piano and comes down and sits on the floor beside him; with one hand he strokes her hair, the other holds up his book. He goes on reading*)

MABEL. You've taught me such a lot, Harry.

SIR HARRY. Have I?

MABEL. There's such a lot in you, I don't understand—but—but I'm trying, Harry.

SIR HARRY. Don't worry, it's not worth it. I'm glad you told me to read this book, it's jolly good. (*another long pause; he reads, and she stares at the fire*)

MABEL. I'm awfully happy, and I know I don't deserve to be.

SIR HARRY. (*reading*) Who does, if you don't?

MABEL. I don't know; but I know I don't. (*a pause*) Harry, put down that stuffy book, and talk to me—I—I want to say heaps of things.

SIR HARRY. Oh, my dear, I'm at such an interesting part. She's just discovered that her mother drinks, and it's upset her fearfully. (*he chucks the book away*) What do you want to say, old sober-sides?

MABEL. Lots of things.

SIR HARRY. Fire away. (*a pause.* MABEL *stares into the fire*)

MABEL. Do lies really matter?

SIR HARRY. I don't like lies—but I'm rather old-fashioned.

MABEL. Aren't they all right if they're in what turns out to be a good cause?

SIR HARRY. I'm afraid lies are rather a matter of temperament.

MABEL. (*thoughtfully*) A good cause! Why did I say that? How is one to know if it's a good cause? What's a good cause to-day seems a bad cause to-morrow.

SIR HARRY. Um!

MABEL. Don't say um. Now, suppose a person who didn't know anything about anything was shown something she didn't want, and was made to believe that that something that she didn't want was what she ought to have, and so she set to work and got it. Well, when she's got it, she finds out that it *is* what she wanted, that she couldn't possibly live without it; ought she then to tell what she got, that she really didn't want it when she was getting it, or ought she just to be content because she's got it?

SIR HARRY. (*gravely turns and looks at her*) Mabel, will you kindly ring the bell?

MABEL. Why?

SIR HARRY. I want to send for two doctors, and probably a strait-jacket. My brain has given way. (*she rises and he bursts out laughing*) Why, you silly old girl—what on earth are you driving at?

MABEL. Nothing. (*lightly*) I thought I had a problem to solve, but it doesn't seem to pan out. What time is Edith coming?

SIR HARRY. Not yet. Come back. I didn't mean to be a brute—what's the problem, old lady? (*she doesn't move till he says very tenderly*) Won't you come? (*she comes back and sits on the floor beside him*) That's right. Now then, say it all over again right from the beginning, and we'll get it straight.

MABEL. No. (*she makes herself comfortable*) It's only that I know of something that happened once that *began* all wrong—but turned out all right. Well, is it right going on being all right when one person in it knows that it wouldn't be all right if the other people in it knew that when it began it was all wrong?

SIR HARRY. My sweetheart, I don't want to appear stupid, but would you mind writing it down? (*a pause—she looks at him—then she bends over and kisses him, rising and leaving her hand resting on his head*)

MABEL. It's awfully hard to be—to be—(*she falters*) to be so—happy—it makes things difficult! (*then suddenly changing her tone and conversation*) Harry dear, you're getting very thin on the top.

SIR HARRY. That's occurred since Thursday—it was Thursday your mother came to stay, wasn't it?

MABEL. (*with a sigh*) Oh, yes, it was Thursday.

SIR HARRY. There's a lot of good in your mother—misdirected—but good.

MABEL. Misdirected, but good. It's awfully funny to watch your mother and my mother together.

SIR HARRY. I'm afraid they don't hit it off.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON *enters.*

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. How tiresome children are!

SIR HARRY. Your children, never.

MABEL. Are they in bed?

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. At last.

SIR HARRY. When are you going out?

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON, Shortly before nine. The carriage *is* ordered.

SIR HARRY. Oh, all right.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Mabel, it distresses me very much to see you in those dowdy frocks.

MABEL. I'm sorry they're dowdy.

SIR HARRY. They're not, they're beautiful. What on earth would you have her wear?

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I hate people to be eccentric. It's all very well for artists and that class of people; they live by it, but it's ridiculous for a married woman, with an assured position, to dress like a schoolgirl with nothing at all.

SIR HARRY. Does she dress like a schoolgirl? I think she looks perfect.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. People who didn't know might think you'd married a bank clerk.

SIR HARRY. Why—what——

MABEL. I dress as I please, mamma—Harry likes it. I like it. I don't think other people matter.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. As a girl you were very fond of jewels, and rightly; you always made the best of yourself. I'm sure you carried my amethysts superbly. Now, your extreme simplicity isn't even mitigated by a bangle. I know it isn't because you haven't got jewels, because while you were engaged Harry was most lavish.

SIR HARRY. By Jove, it's true. I confess I never noticed it, but you have never worn any of those things, have you, Mab?

MABEL. (*slowly*) Not yet——

SIR HARRY. Why? Don't you like them? You did then.

MABEL. Yes, I did then. One of these fine days, when I've justified my existence, I'll make the best of myself again, and burst on you, in all my splendor, or rather your splendor; till then, I'll just be myself, if you don't mind, mamma.

SIR HARRY. (*looks at her curiously*) Is anything the matter?

MABEL. (*quietly*) No, Harry—no—no—only mamma rubs me the wrong way—and—and I'm rather a cat this evening.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*looking at her critically*) Who makes those dreadful gowns?

MABEL. I make these dreadful gowns.

SIR HARRY. (*surprised*) You do—gracious—why?

MABEL. I always used to at home—and—I didn't see why I should change.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. You used to hate it then.

MABEL. Well, I like it now.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Of course, marriage makes a difference to a girl, but it has no right to make such a difference as that.

MABEL. Lots of things make a difference that have no right to make a difference.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I call it a little ungracious to Harry. He'd naturally like you to be smartly gowned—but no—you make yourself a—I can only call it a pinafore—I don't mind that, but you wear it—that's the mistake.

MABEL. That will do, mamma, suppose you keep quite still and read your paper till the carriage is round. I'm feeling a little aggressive this evening.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. You always were an odd child, Mab.

SIR HARRY. That is her chief charm. Bless you, my sweetheart. (*and he, as he passes, takes her hand and presses it lovingly. She sighs, goes to the fire and sits down*) I heard the bell, it's the Graemes, I expect. I'll go down, we'd better have our chat in the study. We shan't be long, dear. I'll bring 'em up before they go.

MABEL. Very well!

SIR HARRY. By the way, where's mother?

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*with an aggressive sniff*) She retired to her room immediately after dinner to write letters—she said good-night to me as she felt they would occupy her until I went to the Gordons'.

SIR HARRY. (*apologetically*) I'm sure she didn't mean it that way.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*blandly*) What way?

MABEL. (*aside to* SIR HARRY) Be quiet—mamma never sees your mother's meanings.

SIR HARRY. Heavens! I nearly explained 'em! (*he lightly touches his wife's cheek and goes down to the study*)

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I find Harry's mother a very difficult old woman to entertain. I suppose at her age the intellect does become dim.

MABEL. I daresay! (*a long pause.* MABEL *bends over her work, looking up now and then in thought at the fire*)

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I see great changes in people. (*pause*) You are not nearly as chatty and light-hearted as you used to be.

MABEL. Really!

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I suppose that's always the way when one has everything one wants.

MABEL. And knows all the time one doesn't deserve it!

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Unless you have been singularly secretive you have done nothing to make you unworthy of anything.

MABEL. Haven't I? (*a pause*) I've lied, I've cheated, I've tricked a man!

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*in horror*) What man?

MABEL. I've only met one man in my life, and I suppose that's the reason I cheated him.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Who is he, pray?

MABEL. (*rising suddenly and tossing her work away*) Does it matter? I think I'd better ring. I'm sure the carriage must be there by now.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*looking at watch*) No, ten minutes yet. Kindly explain this to me, Mabel. You're my daughter, and—it's my duty to see that you're happy.

MABEL. I have everything that money can buy and other things besides—so it's obvious that I'm perfectly happy.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Your manner makes me positively cold.

MABEL. I really wouldn't alter your temperature on my account, mamma—it can't help me.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. But I must positively interfere.

MABEL. (*quietly*) No, please. Nobody shall ever interfere in my life's affairs again. You've done your duty, you started me carefully—on the "broad, straight road that leadeth to"—well, you know the Bible backwards, so I needn't tell you where it leads.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*horrified*) Mabel!

MABEL. Don't worry. I've stopped walking. I'm standing still, thinking of a way out.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I haven't the remotest idea what you're talking about, but I almost fancy that you're having a dig at me.

MABEL. No, I think I'm "having a dig," as you call it, at myself.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Why—why—what have you done?

MABEL. (*rising*) What have I done? I've been a fraud. You want to know the reason of many things—well, here it is—quite quietly. When I think of how we schemed to trap him into this marriage—it gets on my nerves—it—it makes me sick—that's all—it makes me sick—and—it may likewise interest you to know that I have made up my mind to get straight. I'm going to tell him, mamma. I'm going to tell him everything. I shall never be honestly happy till I do.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*aghast*) You'll never be happy *if* you do.

MABEL. Do you really think that? (*she stares at her mother, then flings from her in despair*) Oh! what's the use of asking you what you really think—you never have thought—you never will.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. What are you going to tell him?

MABEL. Everything that he should have known before he married me.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. You daren't do it no woman would be such a fool.

MABEL. I would. (*the clock strikes*)

SERVANT *enters.*

SERVANT. The carriage is at the door, m'm.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. Thank you. (*exit* SERVANT) Mabel, there are times when I should like to shake you.

MABEL. I daresay.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. If you do—this—this wicked thing—I—I will positively never darken your doors again!

MABEL. I may not have a door to darken. You'd better get your wraps, mamma, Harry hates the horses to be kept waiting.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. I—I'm going.

MABEL. I wonder what he'll say when I repeat to him our conversation as to the relative values of himself and old Worburn as investments. You recommended Worburn very highly, you may remember. Of course he does own half Park Lane.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. You—wicked—wicked woman!

MABEL. I'm glad you couldn't convince me—I'm glad I drew the line at Worburn. Good-night, mamma dear, I hope you'll have a cheery evening.

MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON. (*after a pause, during which she glares at her daughter, who is still playing*) I—I can't trust myself to speak to you to-night, I will come to your room in the morning. (*and she goes out.* MABEL *plays on and on, till at length she leans her head forward on the music-rest and cries quietly, then after a time she dries her eyes, gets up and walks to the window, is going to open the shutters, suddenly changes her mind, goes quickly back to the piano and dashes into a mad gallop. The* SERVANT *announces* "Mr. Kennerly")

MABEL. (*starts up in surprise*) Jack—back again? (*and* JACK KENNERLEY *enters*) Why—you are a surprise. When did you get back?

JACK. This morning.

MABEL. And came straight here to see us—that's nice of you.

JACK. Of course I came straight here—what else should I do?

MABEL. Wasn't your mother glad you weren't killed?

JACK. I hope so. (*a pause.* MABEL *looks at him with a smile, then draws in a long breath and almost laughs*)

MABEL. How funny to look at you, Jack—and—think back. I'm glad you've come—because you've come in the nick of time—you—the only person in the world who knows what I really am.

JACK. (*looking at her curiously*) What do you mean by that?

MABEL. You remind me of everything.

JACK. You only remind me of yourself.

MABEL. (*meeting his glance*) How?

JACK. Memories.

MABEL. Have you memories?

JACK. Yes—one must live.

MABEL. Life's easier without them.

JACK. Life wouldn't be worth having without them.

MABEL. I don't think we look at life from the same point of view. (*she moves away to the piano and plays—after a pause he goes to the other side of the piano and leans on it watching her, then he says*)

JACK. Well, Mab!

MABEL. (*not looking up*) Well, Jack!

JACK. Lady Mabel Milanor.

MABEL. Lady Mabel Milanor.

JACK. Like to come to the Aquarium?

MABEL. No, thank you.

JACK. Like to steal a tea in Bond Street?

MABEL. No, thank you.

JACK. Bored?

MABEL. Bored—no. I read about your being wounded.

JACK. Oh!

MABEL. Were you pleased?

JACK. It was all beastly uncomfortable.

MABEL. Glad to be back?

JACK. Very! Glad to see you again, Mab.

MABEL. That's very nice of you.

JACK. I—I've often thought of how—and—and where we should meet again.

MABEL. Have you?

JACK. You remember you told me I was to dine with you often to—to cheer you up?

MABEL. Yes, I remember.

JACK. Perhaps you don't want cheering up!

MABEL. I don't—in the sense that I thought I should have wanted it then. You're looking very brown and well, Jack.

JACK. I'm splendid—and—and—Mab, marriage hasn't spoilt you—you—you look ripping!

MABEL. (*pleased*) Do I?

JACK. Where is your lord and master?

MABEL. (*smiling*) My lord and master is with Mrs. Hugh and her husband in the study.

JACK. The king was in his counting-house counting out his money—the queen was—Mab, I'm awfully glad to see you again—aren't you glad to see me?

MABEL. Of course I am, Jack.

JACK. Then shake hands with me properly.

MABEL. (*looks at him*) I did. (*he drops his hand a little dashed. Another pause, she still playing, he watching her*)

JACK. Well—tell me things.

MABEL. What sort of things?

JACK. I haven't seen you since your marriage.

MABEL. No.

JACK. Well?

MABEL. Well—what?

JACK. Are you satisfied? Has the scheme worked well?

MABEL. Yes, thank you, very well.

JACK. You've been married—how long is it?

MABEL. Long enough.

JACK. Already?

MABEL. I don't mean it that way. (*a pause*)

JACK. And you are perfectly happy?

MABEL. Oh, no, I'm not.

JACK. Why aren't you?

MABEL. Because I don't deserve to be, I suppose.

JACK. It isn't our fault—it's the rotten state of society. I'm sorry you're not happy—and—yet somehow I'm glad.

MABEL. That's friendly of you.

JACK. I can't help it—I always said what I meant, to you. (*going nearer her*) Mab, it's been awful out there, thinking of you as—as some one else's wife.

MABEL. (*looking up at him swiftly*) What?—(*a pause*) Oh—really—has it?

JACK. I see what a fool I made of myself that day.

MABEL. Do you?—that's a good thing. (*a pause*)

JACK. Are you fearfully busy?

MABEL. What do you mean?

JACK. I mean, can you get out—away at all—can we have—(*he laughs a little awkwardly*) Well—there's Bond Street, and the Aquarium, you know.

MABEL. I think I've passed that, Jack, I've been learning things.

JACK. Well—now take a holiday—get away from all "learning," let's have a day out—shake a loose leg.

MABEL. I tell you, I've been learning things. (*she looks at him*) What a child you are, Jack! you're as ignorant as mother.

JACK. (*blankly*) What's happened?

MABEL. The unforeseen.

JACK. Don't be a sphinx, Mab, it doesn't suit you.

MABEL. Don't be inquisitive, Jack, you're not a woman.

JACK. I'm glad of that.

MABEL. Oh, women needn't have a bad time if they choose to be honest.

JACK. Marriage has changed you.

MABEL. Marriage has taught me a great deal.

JACK. What?

MABEL. That there are a great many fools in the world.

JACK. All of them husbands? (*she stops in her playing and again looks up at him, then says with half a smile*)

MABEL. No—not all of them.

JACK. You mean that you think I'm a fool too?

MABEL. Sometimes.

JACK. So do I, but one lives to repent one's folly. Do you remember that day in the woods, the day you got engaged?

MABEL. I remember.

JACK. I was a fool that day, and I've never ceased to regret it.

MABEL. What do you regret?

JACK. A lost opportunity. I loved you—you—you loved me and—and you would have been my wife now and not his. I've cursed myself for that folly often.

MABEL. How odd! I've blessed you for your wisdom.

JACK. People have no right to be wise when love is at stake. I thought I was doing the wise thing for you when I tried to kill our love.

MABEL. (*smiles*) Poor old Jack!

JACK. But life is a poor thing without it, isn't it, Mab? Do you remember telling me you didn't believe in it?

MABEL. Yes!

JACK. But you were wrong, weren't you?

MABEL. Yes, I was wrong.

JACK. All the riches in the world mean nothing alongside of love.

MABEL. Nothing at all.

JACK. I've dreamed of this talk with you often and often, while I've been away. And now—here we are, and —and it's real—and I can hardly believe it. Mab, you're not as glad to see me as I thought you'd be.

MABEL. You're so different—why—you—you're almost a stranger, Jack.

JACK. (*shortly*) I'm not changed.

MABEL. Aren't you really? Then if you remember the last time we had a serious talk together—you gently but firmly declined to marry me, so what do you expect me to do now that we meet again—fall into your arms and sob?

JACK. Well, not exactly.

MABEL. You're a very amusing boy, Jack. How long does it take a soldier to grow up and be a man?

JACK. What do you mean?

MABEL. I mean how long does it take some men to learn common sense?

JACK. Common sense is a curse. Common sense made me give you up. Common sense made you marry Milanor.

MABEL. And still you consider it a curse? Did you fall in love with any one on the steamer?

JACK. (*angrily*) You know I didn't.

MABEL. (*surprised*) How do I?

JACK. You know there's only one woman in the world I ever think of.

MABEL. (*looks up at him with a smile*) Do you mean me?

JACK. (*shortly*) Yes. (*she rises and comes down to him*)

MABEL. Jack, you and I have known each other since we were little children. (*she holds out her hand, and leads him to arm-chair by fire. Sits him down in it, puts a cushion for his head, then sits opposite to him—a pause*) Now, say that over again, quite slowly. There is only one woman in the world you ever think of.

JACK. There is only one woman in the world I ever think of.

MABEL. And that woman is me?

JACK. You.

MABEL. What do you think of me? How do you think of me?

JACK. Do you want to know?

MABEL. Of course I want to know. Go on. I must understand this very thoroughly.

JACK. You—well, I don't quite see what you're driving at.

MABEL. You know me very well—and I want to know how you think of me. I want to see how we stand. When you think of me, what do you think of me as? As I was that day when I stole off with you to the Aquarium? Is that how you think of me?

JACK. No.

MABEL. As I am now—married to Harry? Is that how you think of me?

JACK. No.

MABEL. As the sly, scheming, contemptible husband-hunter, who laughed at love, and all the real beauty of life, because she didn't understand it?

JACK. No, indeed.

MABEL. How then?

JACK. I think of the girl I kissed, that day on the mounds, by the fairy ring.

MABEL. I see. (*a long pause*) Why do you think of that?

JACK. Because I can't forget it. Can you?

MABEL. No. (*she gets serious, he comes to her and takes her hands*)

JACK. Mabel, why is it we can't forget? (*she withdraws her hands and puts them behind her*)

MABEL. Would you like to know?

JACK. I do know.

MABEL. Well! (*he moves towards her—she checks him*) No, thank you, sit down and tell me your view of the matter, and then I'll try and tell you mine. (*a pause*) Go on, I'm listening.

JACK. You—aren't you making it rather difficult for me, Mab?

MABEL. Difficult, how—we know each other very well, Jack—and—we want to know each other better—don't we?

JACK. Yes.

MABEL. And I've got a sort of a feeling that this is either our last meeting or our first.

JACK. It can't be our first—we met that day.

MABEL. We weren't ourselves. I remember trying to explain that to you then.

JACK. You're wrong—we were ourselves that day—we've not been quite ourselves since.

MABEL. Oh—what's the matter with us now?

JACK. We—we—we're incomplete somehow.

MABEL. Oh, are we—what's to be done about it?

JACK. (*slowly*) Let us get back to where we were that day.

MABEL. (*looking at him a little puzzled*) You know that I am married?

JACK. Married, yes—to him—but I love you.

MABEL. Jack, are all men like you?

JACK. I hope not.

MABEL. So do I. Go on, I'm learning a great deal. You loved me. Out of consideration for my happiness you didn't marry me—you went away, and I married some one else. Now you've come back—and—and you seem to have something on your mind.

JACK. I have.

MABEL. What?

JACK. I can't tell you now.

MABEL. I—I'm much more learned in the world's ways now than I was when you went away, Jack, shall I help you out?—you remember so vividly what I was then—that you feel justified in classifying me now—I suppose I have no right to object.

JACK. I don't understand that.

MABEL. Let's get it clear. Well now—where do we stand? You think that in reality you and I belong to each other, and he's only an interloper.

JACK. Isn't he? If it hadn't been for him we should have been married.

MABEL. Well, we're not married and he's here—a very palpable fact. What do you suggest?—this is very interesting.

JACK. It's impossible to discuss it like this.

MABEL. No, it isn't. Life's a very serious thing, Jack, and it's better to talk things over thoroughly before one tries to alter it to suit oneself. You think we're incomplete?

JACK. We are incomplete.

MABEL. Well, of course that's bad. Now, how are we to complete ourselves? Shall we go away together to-night to Dieppe—Dieppe is the place people usually go to to complete themselves, isn't it?

JACK. I'm only thinking of you. You told me you were unhappy.

MABEL. I know—and—it's very kind of you. How should we put the case to Harry? We could—at least I mean I should, of course, leave a letter behind on my dressing-table to explain that I lack completion, and have left everything I have of value in life that I may seek it. That's right, isn't it—when wives leave their husbands they always leave a letter on their dressing-table, don't they? It's a stiff railway fare, Jack, and I've no money; have you?

JACK. Stop this! I'm serious.

MABEL. Oh, we needn't go—this is his house—we could stay here, but it would be an undignified hole-in-corner business—wouldn't it? Stand up, Jack—look at me. I've suggested the two only possible methods. You're a man of the world—our happiness—our future is at stake—which do you prefer? Well, haven't you got anything to say?

JACK. How can I say anything when you talk like this?

MABEL. How else am I to talk—we want to get this thing straight, don't we? We oughtn't to go on in this dreadfully incomplete state. What are you prepared to do?

JACK. Anything!

MABEL. (*suddenly with a long breath*) Oh, my God, how you show me to myself as I might have been—but for—for him—you are prepared to do anything. Well, there's one thing you've got to do, and I think the sooner you do it the better. Open that door—go quietly downstairs—take your hat off the hat-rack, and sneak out into the street. Either our last meeting or our first, Jack—it's our last.

JACK. You don't mean——

MABEL. (*smiling*) I mean that you are the most contemptible thing I have ever had the misfortune to know,

except myself. I'm not in the least angry with you, but —but do go and get your hat and run back to Africa as quickly as ever you can. You've done lots of very brave things out there I know—now go and do a lot more, and your mother and sisters and all the other people who don't know you will keep on being fearfully proud of you, and you and I who know each other will keep the laugh up our sleeves. Good-bye. (*she goes back to the piano and resumes her playing—he stands staring at her*)

JACK. You won't think like this to-morrow.

MABEL. (*playing*) Won't I?

JACK. (*moving to her almost fiercely*) Do you think I don't know what your life is?

MABEL. I'm sure you don't.

JACK. You don't love your husband, and to you life without love must be hell.

MABEL. Do get your hat.

JACK. Don't play the fool with me. I *know*, you know I know. (*hoarsely*) Six months ago you asked me to marry you. It—it was impossible, and so you married Milanor. You're right, of course, to hide your misery even from me; but I know what things are, and I know what hell must be in your heart.

MABEL. (*still playing*) Harry will be here soon. We might talk the hell in my heart over, mightn't we? Three heads are better than two, even if one's a husband's.

JACK. Perhaps you'd like me to read him this letter.

MABEL. What letter?

JACK. The letter you wrote me the night you got engaged. (*she closes the piano with a snap and rises*)

MABEL. That letter! You've kept it? (JACK *takes it from his pocket*) Give it to me please. (*she reads it. A pause. She turns, looks at* JACK, *smiles sadly, and says with a long drawn breath*) I know what's right now—I'll give it to him to-night—and tell him all.

JACK. You'd give him that letter—you daren't—why, he'd know you——

MABEL. He'd know I didn't love him when I married him—I want him to know it.

JACK. Why?

MABEL. Because I love him now. (*a pause*)

JACK. You love him—you're sure?

MABEL. (*quietly*) I'd sooner starve with him in a cellar than to be the greatest queen in all the world.

JACK. You love him, Mabel? Mabel, don't—don't play the fool about this—is it true?

MABEL. Quite true.

JACK. Then—then (*a very long pause*) I've been a fool —I—I'm very sorry—I beg your pardon.

MABEL. (*with a bitter little laugh that is half a sob*)

We've all been fools—worse than fools, at one time or another in our lives. I don't think you need apologize to me. (*she walks up to the window, and he turns and stares blankly into the fire. At last he says*)

JACK. I—I'm not good at thinking things out—but—but, Mab—if you love him—and he—he loves you—isn't it better to leave things as they are?

MABEL. No!

JACK. (*slowly*) Suppose—he——

MABEL. I know—(*long pause*) I know the risk—but—I'm going straight at last, Jack, you don't know how—how awful the whole of my life has been—I mean when I was quite young—truth didn't seem to matter then. I seem to have lived in an atmosphere of lies—and it was all nice—and easy—and pleasant—but since I've married him—I've somehow begun to understand that it's truth that counts—it's truth that means life, Jack—the other isn't real.

JACK. (*very earnestly*) Mab, don't tell him.

MABEL. (*slowly*) I can't help telling him. I want to know that I can love him without being ashamed.

JACK. I don't know what to say. You must think me an awful cad.

The door opens and MRS. GRAEME *enters laughing, followed by her husband and* SIR HARRY.

MRS. GRAEME. You've been a perfect angel, Harry, I don't—— How are you, Mr. Kennerly? Heavens! I thought you were in South Africa.

SIR HARRY. Hallo, Kennerly—how are you? Glad to see you safe and——

JACK. Fairly sound.

SIR HARRY. By gad! What a time you fellows must have had. Jolly glad I wasn't with you. Sorry we were so long, Mab—but Edith's notions of business are nearly as staggering as Hugh's.

HUGH. Oh, you've made it clear now. It's all awfully simple—it was all that "brought forward" business that worried me.

EDITH. Poor dear old Hugh. I'm afraid you've no brain. I notice that men with your style of over-developed mustache seldom have.

SIR HARRY. He's the only husband you've got, so you'd much better make the best of him.

MABEL. (*very brightly*) Never mind, Hugh, I've no brain either.

HUGH. Somehow I don't miss mine.

EDITH. (*to* HUGH) Now if *you'd* married Mabel—and (*turning to* SIR HARRY)—and *you* had married me when I suggested it, how well arranged it would all have been!

SIR HARRY. Beautiful—but see how fond you are of Hugh!

EDITH. (*making a face*) It's quite pathetic, isn't it? Hugh dear, do sit straight—we're all looking at you.

LADY MILANOR *enters, reading a letter.*

SIR HARRY. That the nine o'clock post?

LADY M. Yes. Only one, for me. Yours have gone to your study, Harry. Mine's from Aunt Gertrude, and it actually has something in it. Your cousin Ethel is engaged, Harry.

SIR HARRY. (*springing up*) To Phil Lennox—I'm jolly glad.

LADY M. Phil Lennox! don't be ridiculous. Phil hasn't two brass farthings to rub together.

SIR HARRY. (*astonished*) Then who else?

LADY M. To Worburn, the great brewer.

SIR HARRY. (*horrified*) Worburn! *The* Worburn?

LADY M. There is only one Worburn.

SIR HARRY. But she was in love with young Phil Lennox!

LADY M. That didn't count.

SIR HARRY. What do you mean?—engaged to Worburn!—it—it can't be true.

LADY M. It is. All those girls have been lucky—haven't they?—it's extraordinary.

HUGH. How have they been lucky?

EDITH. In marrying so well.

HUGH. Is it lucky to marry that brute Worburn?

EDITH. It's lucky to be in control of that brute's millions.

SIR HARRY. (*who has been standing dumfounded*) Ethel, poor little Ethel!—who forced her into that shame? (MABEL *listens, and watches her husband intently during this*)

LADY MILANOR. Forced her? Shame? Harry, you've been at that poetry again. Why, she won him in the teeth of the opposition of all the marriageable girls in the county.

SIR HARRY. (*breaking out almost passionately*) I call it damnable; and there's something rotten in the life and morality of a country that countenances such things.

LADY MILANOR. My dear boy——

SIR HARRY. There is—and I repeat it's damnable! Ethel—one of the sweetest, prettiest, happiest little fairy children that ever sent up the sunshine of her laugh to heaven—to be sold to an old brute like that.

LADY MILANOR. Harry!

SIR HARRY. I mean it, it makes my blood boil.

LADY MILANOR. She did it of her own free will.

EDITH. I saw the way the land lay at Henley—I thought she'd pull it off—she was playing him beautifully.

SIR HARRY. You mean to say Ethel——

LADY MILANOR. How is Ethel different from all other marriageable girls?

SIR HARRY. If she did this willingly—then I hope to God she *is* different from other girls.

LADY MILANOR. Rubbish!

SIR HARRY. (*fiercely*) I tell you that a woman who marries a man for his money or position is a—is a—well, it's a difficult thing to discuss this subject in a drawing-room, but you know what I mean. (JACK KENNERLY *is standing with his back to the fire.* MABEL *is standing by the piano. As* SIR HARRY *says this she turns with a sad little smile and meets* JACK'S *look*)

EDITH. I think your views are absurd.

SIR HARRY. Merely because you won't look at the matter fairly.

EDITH. According to you there isn't an honest woman in the world.

SIR HARRY. Rubbish—there are thousands.

EDITH. But they cease to be when they marry—that's so odd.

SIR HARRY. They don't when they marry men they love.

EDITH. How many women have you met who married men they loved?

SIR HARRY. Heaps.

EDITH. It would be interesting to hear you name one or two, wouldn't it, Mab?

MABEL. (*turning away with a light laugh*) I've never thought about it.

EDITH. Do name one or two, Harry.

SIR HARRY. Well, there's my mother.

EDITH. Do you bear your son out in his statement, Lady Milanor?

LADY MILANOR. My dear, I was a parson's daughter—the middle one of nine. My father's income never exceeded £240 a year.

EDITH. Are you answered? (SIR HARRY *sits down with a shrug of despair*)

HUGH. (*sitting up and solemnly facing* LADY MILANOR) When you married Sir Robert, with huge rent rolls, it didn't strike you that you were selling yourself, did it, Lady Milanor?

LADY MILANOR. In my young days a girl never thought of such things. My dear man, it's her duty to marry well—she owes it to herself—to her people—and—and to any family of her own that she may happen to have after-

wards. (*she turns to her son*) Take your own case—where would you have been if I hadn't married your father?

EDITH. Bah—men don't understand these things.

SIR HARRY. No—and, thank God, some women don't either. Bless you, Mab. (*he kisses her as she passes him*) We know better—don't we?

MABEL. (*sitting down at the piano—playing softly*) Yes—we know better. (EDITH *watches* MABEL *and is struck by her face*)

SIR HARRY. (*half to himself*) Ethel—poor little Ethel—the dearest little thing—oh, God, it's brutal!

HUGH. (*slowly unfolding himself from his chair*) Well, ye know I don't often talk, but it seems to me it don't matter much. Edie's often told me she didn't give a button for me when we married—but that don't amount to a row of pins, because since that day, don't ye see, I've grown on her—and we jog along in double harness—er—swimmingly, don't we, Edith?

EDITH. Of course we do.

SIR HARRY. Well, all I can say is from the man's point of view, sooner than have been married for my money I'd——

EDITH. (*lightly touching him on the arm*) Change the conversation.

SIR HARRY. (*laughing*) Yes, I'll change the conversation. I beg everybody's pardon, I was getting hot, but (*sadly*) I was very fond of Ethel—look—the mater, having shattered all my faith in her, has calmly gone to sleep.

EDITH. She's wiser than you, Harry. Oh, ever so much wiser than you.

LADY MILANOR. (*rousing herself*) I wasn't asleep, I was just remembering something. (*and she leaves the room hurriedly*)

SIR HARRY. Well, I don't care what any of you say, I stick to my belief, there are real true, happy, honest married people in the world.

HUGH. (*turning suddenly to* JACK) You're jolly silent, Kennerly, what have you got to say about all this?

JACK. (*with a laugh*) I'm not a married man, so I daren't confess to knowing anything about love.

EDITH. Very discreet of you.

JACK. But I do agree with Milanor, there are real true, honest, happy people in the world. I've met two. (*he bows slightly to* SIR HARRY *and* MABEL) Mabel, if you'll forgive me I've got to be off, the mater's rather seedy, and I promised I'd not keep her late, she still waits up for me.

SIR HARRY. (*rising*) I say, now you're back, let's see something of you—can you dine with us to-morrow?

JACK. (*embarrassed*) I should be delighted, but——

MABEL. (*from piano*) Do, Jack—it's only just ourselves.

JACK. Very well—I—I should like to. (*general farewells, and he goes*)

EDITH. Well, we must be moving too, if we're to get to the Argyles to-night. Aren't you two coming?

MABEL. No!

SIR HARRY. We've realized that there's more in life than dining out and spending hours miserably with people you don't care a bit about.

EDITH. What is there?

SIR HARRY. There is home—you go—we've been out so much we're taking a night off the treadmill for a change.

EDITH. Well, it's been awfully sweet of you, Harry, to put us right. If Hugh had only had even a little brain I needn't have worried you. Good-night, dear. (*she kisses* MABEL)

SIR HARRY. You'd better leave the letters, Hugh. I'll go through 'em more thoroughly and report on 'em in the morning.

HUGH. Right you are! (*he puts a lot of loose letters on the table—on top of* MABEL'S *letter to* JACK) Good-bye, old man, and thanks awfully. (SIR HARRY *and* MABEL *move with them to the door.* SIR HARRY *goes downstairs with them, and* MABEL *stands watching for an instant, then moves down to the fire*)

MABEL. "The woman who marries a man for money or position is a——" Oh, why did he say that to-night?

SIR HARRY *re-enters very cheerfully.*

SIR HARRY. Poor old Edith, she does amuse me—mind you, she's really awfully fond of Hugh, and I'm sure they're as happy as kings.

MABEL. Despite the fact that she didn't care for him when she married? (*he has gathered up all the letters* HUGH *left, including* MABEL'S *letter to* JACK)

SIR HARRY. Bah!—she cared for him right enough—that's only her pose.

MABEL. (*slowly*) Harry, there is something I want to tell you.

SIR HARRY. (*looking up in surprise*) To tell me? (UNCLE JO *comes in*)

UNCLE JO. The jabberers gone? (*he makes himself comfortable by the fire*)

SIR HARRY. They have. (*still looking at his wife*) What do you want to tell me?

MABEL. (*glancing at* UNCLE JO) I—by-and-bye—when we are—alone. (*she goes out of the room*)

SIR HARRY. (*docketing the various letters*) Poor little Ethel! I can't get that tragedy out of my mind.

.E JO. What tragedy?
[ARRY. Oh, only a suicide.
.E JO. Some one you knew?
[ARRY. (*very sadly*) Yes, a dear little girl I knew.
ARRY *is looking through the letters when he stops*
y and looks up) Now what the devil has this got
ith Edith?—it's Mab's writing. (*he reads it, then he*
nd looks at his uncle, who is smoking placidly
at the fire, then he slowly reads it again, and after
pause, he says with a little shake in his voice) It's
joke. (JO *turns and looks at him, he has the en-*
n one hand and the letter in another, and is alter-
staring at them)
.E JO. Hullo!
IARRY. (*lamely*) They're playing a joke on me,
(*he reads the letter*) "Dear Jack"—It's to Ken-
ner cousin Jack Kennerly, you know. "Dear Jack,
ised to tell you the result of the hunt—the wheel
ne full circle—I am there—we are to be married in
ry—so, I am to rule in Chesterfield Street, and play
ountiful at Fawn Court. Well, I worked hard for
I've got it all. It may amuse you to know that I
roughly ashamed of myself, and more miserable
've ever been in my life—it would be a great relief
him all about it, and ask him to kindly buy some
.—Yours, Mabel. P.S.—Burn this." (*a long pause*)
.E JO. Practical jokes of that sort are very silly.
IARRY. Very silly. (SIR HARRY *sits motionless,*
out in front of him. UNCLE JO *watches him un-*

.E JO. Who wrote the stuff?
IARRY. She did.
.E JO. I don't believe it—she doesn't play tricks
at.
IARRY. (*quite motionless*) It—it—isn't like her,
it—but she has.
.E JO. (*crossing to him*) Let me see. (*he takes it*)
did you find it?
IARRY. Among Edith's papers—don't say anything
t—we—we'll pretend we haven't read it, and then
gh will be upon our side, won't it? (UNCLE JO *is*
over the letter, then on the envelope something strikes

.E JO. The Borcambe postmark.
IARRY. I saw.
.E JO. Date, June the second—why, that was the
ay——
IARRY. (*very slowly—half to himself*) The very
e met by the fairies' ring—the very day we—she
t that night—she—the very day we—— (*then almost*

fiercely) No—no—don't let's jump to conclusions—let's think it over—quietly—quite quietly. (*a long pause*) It—it can't be true—it—it isn't possible—why—why—I remember everything she said—and just how she looked when she said it. Why—why—she held out her arms to me—and said—Harry—Harry—if you were starving I'd marry you to-morrow. It—it couldn't have been a lie—she—she wouldn't have lied to me then—like that. Oh, no—it isn't true—of course it isn't true. Where's the letter? (*he rises, picks it up. Then he sinks back into his chair again, and sits silent. Then he whispers—almost to himself*) I remember her last words to him—"I'll write to you—you ought to get the letter in two days"—and—and—is this what she promised to write—— (*a long pause—while he stares at the letter*)

UNCLE JO. How did it get here anyhow?

SIR HARRY. He must have brought it back to her to-night. He wanted to marry her—she refused him the day she accepted me, and—and Ethel loved Lennox and married Worburn. "How is Ethel different from other marriageable girls?"—my mother said that. (UNCLE JO *moves a little towards him*) No, no—give me time, Uncle Jo. I—I've got to think this out. (*and he buries his head on his folded arms. There's a long pause, and something very like a sob is heard.* UNCLE JO *goes to him quickly, almost angrily*)

UNCLE JO. Come, come—don't be a fool, man—if she did write it she didn't mean it, and what matter if she did mean it then, she knows a damn sight better now! Come, come, I shouldn't give it another thought if I were you.

SIR HARRY. (*lifting a haggard face—says hoarsely*) Seven months of it—how she must loathe me!—Oh, God, what a cur I feel!

UNCLE JO. (*looking at him in amazement*) You! What have you done?

SIR HARRY. Robbed her of everything—her youth—her love—her purity—robbed her of heaven and shut her up in hell—oh, why didn't she tell me? I wouldn't have done it—I didn't know—how could I know? Why didn't she tell me—why didn't she tell me?

UNCLE JO. If any one is to blame she is.

SIR HARRY. Don't! She was a child—she didn't understand. (*he starts from his chair and walks rapidly to and fro, thinking. Then suddenly he breaks out fiercely again*) I won't believe it—it's humanly impossible—all her life with me can't have been a piece of acting—it can't have been a lie. She couldn't have kept it up, day and night, night and day, for seven months. (*he stops, listening intently, hearing her footfall. Then he turns almost pitifully to his uncle, and whispers*) She's coming—watch

her—watch her—it can't be all a lie. (MABEL *enters quietly, humming softly to herself. The two men appear absorbed, but are in reality watching her. She is looking about her furtively for the letter. She sees it and picks it up.* SIR HARRY, *not looking up, speaks unconcernedly*) What's that?

MABEL. Nothing of importance—an old letter. (*there's a pause*) I—am I in the way?

SIR HARRY. No. (*another pause. Something in his face disturbs her, and she moves towards him*)

MABEL. Harry dear—you're looking so tired. Uncle Jo, don't make him work any more to-night. (*softly*) I'll come back again when he has gone. (*and she goes out*)

SIR HARRY. (*very slowly*) Poor little girl! poor little girl! Did you see? did you see? You heard what she said about the letter, and how she said it. If we hadn't known—we should never have suspected anything. Lies—lies—lies—and I'm the cause of them. I have made truth impossible.

UNCLE JO. I don't see that she's to be pitied.

SIR HARRY. Don't you? If the prospect of marriage with me made her "more miserable than she'd ever been in her life"—what must it be for her now that we're married and she can't escape me night or day?

UNCLE JO. You're making a mountain out of a molehill—girls get accustomed to anything.

SIR HARRY. Not to the kisses of a man they hate.

UNCLE JO. Rubbish! Now, look here, forget all about that damned letter—look at it from a sensible man's point. You wanted her—you've got her—she's made you as happy as a king—and what more can a man expect from a woman?

SIR HARRY. A great deal.

UNCLE JO. It's unreasonable. I'm sure she makes an admirable wife.

SIR HARRY. (*with a passionate outburst, striking the table with his fist*) Makes an admirable wife—what a foul phrase—that's it—she's been an admirable wife; gentle, uncomplaining, submissive, she's laughed when I laughed, sighed when I sighed—danced to me, sung to me—fed me and kept me comfortable—soothed my body—and satisfied my mind. Oh, the bargain has been honestly fulfilled. I give her money and position—she gives up herself, in complete surrender—this has gone on for seven months. Uncle Jo, would you like to speculate how often, during these seven months, a longing has come over her to kill either herself or me?

UNCLE JO. You're talking damn nonsense. Here you are, the pair of you—you've made a beautiful home——

SIR HARRY. (*interrupting*) Oh no—we've never had

a home. It's been a stable for me—a prison for her. (*he rises and goes to the fireplace and rings the bell*)

UNCLE JO. You—you'll think differently in the morning, when you've cooled down.

SIR HARRY. We'll see—I don't think I'm excited—I'm numbed—that's all. (*a pause—he goes back to the table—then he suddenly shudders and drops his head on his hands*) The past comes over me in waves and makes me sick. (*a* MAN SERVANT *enters*) Pack some things for me, will you? —I—I shall be away some days. (MAN SERVANT *bows and goes away again*)

UNCLE JO. You're going?

SIR HARRY. Of course I'm going.

UNCLE JO. Without speaking to her?

SIR HARRY. I—I'll write—I—I couldn't speak to her of this. I couldn't—man, don't you understand, I love her more than anything in all the wide, wide world! (*and with a dry choking sob, he turns his back and walks to the far corner of the room. There's a pause. Then he comes back and resumes his seat at the table.* UNCLE JO *watches him anxiously*)

UNCLE JO. Don't do anything foolish.

SIR HARRY. I won't!

UNCLE JO. What do you mean to do?

SIR HARRY. (*slowly*) Nothing—at least, nothing that matters to anybody except myself. (MABEL *comes in quietly and says reproachfully.*)

MABEL. Oh, Harry—still working! (UNCLE JO *grunts —she goes to the piano and plays softly*)

SIR HARRY. (*to his uncle*) Go—go—I—I'll try and speak to her now. (UNCLE JO *goes quietly out of the room, and* MABEL *plays on*)

MABEL. Harry, I want you to be very gentle with me—it's very difficult to tell you—and—and I don't know if you will be able to understand. (*he is not looking at her, nor she at him*) Do you remember—that day, in Bond Street, saying to me, "Come out of the wilderness into the light"?

SIR HARRY. Yes.

MABEL. I pretended to understand you—it was a lie! (SIR HARRY *looks up startled*) That day in the woods—when you asked me to marry you—and—and I said I'd marry you if you were starving—it—it was the truth, and yet it was half a lie then.

SIR HARRY. (*he turns towards her wearily*) I don't understand!

MABEL. Don't look at me, Harry—you'll never care for me again—after what I've got to tell you—at least I hope some day you will—but—but it's bound to be a long time. (*all the time she plays and he stands by his table listening*) I was told to marry you, I made up my mind to marry

you, and I—I thought it all out. That day by the fairies' ring—when you came I didn't love you, I thought I loved some one else, he—he had kissed me—and I didn't know—but before that I had laid plans to marry you—then when he kissed me—I—I wanted to marry him. That's where I was such a fool, but he wouldn't, so it was all all right—and so I—I married you. This letter, it's to Jack. I wrote it the day we got engaged—it tells how I'd won you—I'd sold myself and that I knew I was a beast—that's all.

SIR HARRY. (*very sadly*) If you'd only told me before!

MABEL. I was a coward and afraid.

SIR HARRY. I would have gone away ages ago, and then it wouldn't have been so bad. (*she looks swiftly at him—appealing. Then her head droops a little. A pause*) Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk—we can't undo the past—but—but—we'll think of the future. (*he turns to her with a look of infinite tenderness*) You're very young—just nineteen, aren't you? It will be better after I've gone away.

MABEL. You'll go away?

SIR HARRY. I'll go to-night.

MABEL. (*shivers a little and turns sadly from him*) I—I thought you would if I told you.

SIR HARRY. Then you do understand me a little?

MABEL. (*looking at him sadly*) A little, yes. (*then she turns from him and sits listless, and there is a silence. At last she asks him almost pitifully*) What shall *I* do?

SIR HARRY. I don't know—what do you want to do?

MABEL. Whatever you wish.

SIR HARRY. (*shrinking*) Don't talk like that—that's finished—you—you're free.

MABEL. (*wistfully*) Won't you let me do what you'd like me to do?

SIR HARRY. (*bitterly*) Don't—don't—our bargain's over—I'm not your owner now.

MABEL. Harry! (*then he breaks out almost fiercely*)

SIR HARRY. Be fair to me! I've spoilt your life, I know—but it wasn't my fault—nobody told me—I loved you. I meant no harm—be fair to me. (*then he stops*) I'm sorry—I didn't mean to break out like that. (*a long pause*) I've thought it all out—there's only one thing to be done. I—I'll go away and—and then, soon, you will be quite free.

MABEL. (*looks at him puzzled*) Free?—I—free of you?—I don't understand.

SIR HARRY. (*with a bitter laugh*) Great happiness takes time to realize.

MABEL. (*shrinking*) Harry!

SIR HARRY. Don't mind what I say—I'm not quite myself. (*he laughs a little*) You see—you—you've hit me

rather hard—and—and I was very fond of you—I've always tried to do my best for you. I'm going to do all I can for you now.

MABEL. How do you help me by going away ?

SIR HARRY. You'll know soon—but afterwards—— (*he turns and faces her*) I don't care who he is, or what he is, he'll never love you as—as I have loved you—good-bye. (*and he turns to leave the room—she rises with a cry*)

MABEL. No, no—not yet—not yet—Harry, you're very hard—my fault—I've made you hard—wait a minute—oh, do wait a minute—I—— (*a pause, he comes down to her*)

SIR HARRY. Well ?

MABEL. When—when you've gone—after a time—time is a wonderful thing, Harry, and—it might even make things seem different to you. If it should and you should remember me—and what we've been to each other—do you think you'd ever ask me to come home ?

SIR HARRY. What do you mean ?

MABEL. Only that I—— (*she falters—he stares at her, then moves quickly towards her*)

SIR HARRY. You said—ask you to come home—home—where ?

MABEL. I've only known one home, that's ours. (*then passionately*) I didn't mean to ask you this—I thought I could be brave—but, oh, it's so hard to be brave. I'm not asking favors of you. I don't want you to be good to me—but, later on when you think of me—and I know you'll have to think of me—think of me as I've been these last few months, because that's me, don't think of me as I was, when we were first engaged, because I—I was different then, I didn't know. (*his eyes on hers—his voice strained with excitement*)

SIR HARRY. You—what are you saying ? What do you mean ?

MABEL. I can't help it—don't be hard on me. Oh, Harry, Harry, let me think that—some day you'll write to me—come to me—send for me—let me come home again.

SIR HARRY. (*tossing back his head with a glad shout*) Great God—you don't know what you've done. (*he rings the bell violently*) You've pulled us out of the fire—my dear—oh, my dear, I was going to make such a fool of myself. (*the* MAN SERVANT *enters, followed by* UNCLE JO) Have you packed ?

SERVANT. Nearly, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. Then unpack and be damned to you.

UNCLE JO. (*amazed*) What the——

SIR HARRY. Go away ! Go away !—we don't want you—go away ! (*he holds out his arms to his wife*) My dear. Oh, my dear.

MABEL. Harry! *(she stands bewildered for an instant then realizing the truth, she goes to him with a sob)*
SIR HARRY. *(holding her tightly in his arms, half laughing and half crying)* Out of the wilderness into the light at last!

THE END.

5

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No. 197

HER VOTE

A Comedy in One Act

BY

H. V. ESMOND

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A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY

H. V. ESMOND.

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Gift of John Crain

HER VOTE.

First produced on May 13th, 1909, at Terry's Theatre, London, with the following Cast :—

THE GIRL	Miss Eva Moore.
THE DRUDGE	Miss Suzanne Sheldon.
THE CLERK	Mr. H. V. Esmond.

THE PRESENT TIME.

HER VOTE.

SCENE.—*Her father's office. A busy looking room. Large writing table* C. *at right of which sits the old* CLERK *at work There is a telephone on the table. After a moment's pause the door* L. *is flung open and the* GIRL *rustles in full of intention and determination all over her. The* CLERK *looks up from his labours and sighs resignedly on seeing her. She sits down opposite him.*

GIRL. (*sweetly*) Good afternoon, Mr. Furdew. I hope I don't disturb you.

The CLERK *moves important papers from under her parasol and gold purses, etc., that she lavishly disposes on the table.*

CLERK. Not at all, Miss Elizabeth. I'm afraid the lace of your parasol has——

GIRL. (*moving her parasol*) Tch! I didn't see the inkpot was open. Is my father in?

CLERK. No, Miss Elizabeth.

GIRL. Then I want the telephone.

CLERK. Your father could get no telephone message now, Miss Elizabeth—he's on his way to Leeds.

GIRL. I am not telephoning to my father.

CLERK. (*apologising*) I beg your pardon.

(*She takes the telephone, and speaks*)

GIRL. I want 132 Central—please. (*a pause*) Number engaged—not at all. How annoying they are, it's only because girls are at the other end. If it were a man! Oh, yes; 123 Central? No, no. 132 Central. Which is it? Oh I don't know now—you've put me off with your talking—wait a minute—I'll get the book. (*to* CLERK) It's absurd how they hustle one.

CLERK. Quite, Miss. (*he hands her the telephone book*)

GIRL. Thank you so much. (*she runs through the pages hurriedly*) W. W. W. which end of the book is W? (*the telephone rings—she drops book and seizes it*) Yes, what? —Oh, good. (*she laughs and listens*) How are you?—don't be silly, Reggie. I'm in a serious mood. You were just writing to me were you, how funny, great news have you? So have I. I've got two seats for the meeting to-night—what meeting? *The meeting* the suffragettes!!

What did you say? Rates—no nothing about rates, only indirectly. You said *rats* did you? Well if you say things like that again you'll make me angry—yes, angry! You don't realise that it's a movement. (*she gives an enormous importance to the word*) Yes, a movement. A great movement! and it's of Vital Importance to our Sex. Yes, I said sex. what? You think we're losing sight of it—what the movement? No, the sex! Well I don't mean to lose sight of the movement anyway—it's most vital to us—(*she stamps*)—it doesn't so much matter about the sex—we've all *got* that—we haven't got the other. But it's coming—and what I want to say is I've got these tickets and you must take me to the meeting to-night. What? You're sending me a note? Tell me now. Can't talk it through the 'phone? How funny you men are. (*she puts 'phone down for a minute and turns sweetly to* CLERK) I hope I'm not disturbing you, Mr. Honeydew.

CLERK. (*grimly*) Not in the least, Miss Elizabeth.

(*She grips the 'phone again*)

GIRL. No, Reggie, I didn't leave the wire—your news is more serious than votes. Reggie, don't be silly—how could it be. Oh, yes—we'll get them—and *you know* we ought to have them because you told me so only last Thursday in Lady Candriff's conservatory. No, it wasn't because the waltz music made you dreamy. No! I won't be chained to a seat—and what? No! I won't write my views in anybody's blood. (*then vehemently stamping*) No, No, No—what I say is—there are a million more of us than there are of you, and we are not going to be left in the cold. No I never said a vote would warm me—but what I say and what all we women say is—something has got to be done. You can't come round for the moment! No, I don't want you—I've joined the movement.

The door is opened cautiously and the DRUDGE *looks in. The* CLERK *snaps at her.*

CLERK. Well?

The DRUDGE *rubs her nose with her apron and nods towards the* GIRL, *who turns sweetly to the* CLERK.

GIRL. It's all right, Mr. Dewdrop. I told her to follow me up—she is in "the movement." (*then to the* DRUDGE, *most graciously*) Won't you sit on that very hard sofa? (*the* DRUDGE *accepts the invitation*) (*the telephone rings again*) No, no, I didn't leave the wire, but a lady dropped in who entirely feels with *me* and I merely spoke to her for a moment.

The DRUDGE *is heard to murmer huskily.*

DRUDGE. I sweeps out these buildin's—I works 'ard, I want a vote.

GIRL. (*soothingly*) It's all right—it's coming . . . and oh! then won't it be splendid !!

DRUDGE. (*sadly*) I 'ankers for it.

GIRL. It *will* make *such* a difference to us all. Oh, you've no idea! I, oh, our *status* will be so much improved.

DRUDGE. My status 'as been a-weighing on me for weeks past.

GIRL. So it has on all our sex.

DRUDGE. I took carbodinate of soda for mine (*very depressed*)—it didn't move it.

GIRL. (*a little agitated*) No, no! Our status isn't inside us—it's—as it were—outside—apart, as it were—politics and personal dignity—er—sex perogatives—I mean preogatives—(*she makes up her mind not to wrestle with the word and continues as if no accident had happened!* *Talking to the* DRUDGE) Oh, you must go to some of the meetings—it's no good their saying, "Men are men, and women are women" because we know better than that, don't we? We want to be up and doing, don't we?

DRUDGE. I'm allus up an' doin'.

GIRL. Yes, but I mean in a noble way—not—not practical things but—noble things—things one can't explain even to oneself—you know what I mean.

DRUDGE. (*sadly smoothing her apron—with a far away look in her eyes*) Yus, it's the vote.

GIRL. Oh, I never thought I should feel so enthusiastic about anything as I feel about this—to—to—expand one's mind—to—to open one's arms and grasp the intangible, as it were—it gives us women new life. (*she turns vehemently to the* DRUDGE) Look at the area. (*puts back 'phone*)

The DRUDGE *comes back to facts a little hurt.*

DRUDGE. Eh!

GIRL. (*apologetically*) I don't mean the area you mean—I'm *so* sorry—I mean the—oh, the—well you know what I mean. I think its fine!

DRUDGE. The last area I scrubbed——

GIRL. *Not* that area, I told you. (*then a little reproachfully*) I'm afraid you're not being very intelligent—the Political Area—where we shall rule.

CLERK. Will you vote Tariff Reform, Miss Elizabeth?

GIRL. Of course—it's a fine thing.

CLERK. You know all the facts?

GIRL. (*inclined to be truthful—hesitates a little*) Er—I don't think I know quite *all*.

CLERK. I see—you are content to follow a male leader,

GIRL. There's nothing else to follow. (*the* CLERK *returns peacefully to his labours. The* GIRL *regards him for a moment with suspicion—again the telephone rings—seizing it*) That you Reggie? Yes. Oh, yes. My lady friend is still here —what? (*a pause while she listens*) What an extraordinary request—read her your note out loud—well I never. But —right—I *do* promise to. No, it isn't here yet—then you can't come round yourself. No—Oh, Reggie, yes I *swear* I'll read it out loud and then telephone you straight—right —right—but Reggie, dear old man, it's no use your talking, we want the vote, and what we *want* we *get*. Reggie, I didn't mean to call you "dear old man"—it slipped out because the telephone was between us. (*she suddenly ripples*) Oh, Reggie, shut up. (*then in a hoarse whisper*) Don't keep talking about her as "my lady friend," she isn't a friend really, she—she's only an acquaintance. I met her on the office stairs—she is interested in the movement, that's all—you can't hear? Well, I can't shout—she's sitting quite close. (*she turns sweetly to the* DRUDGE *who shows symptoms of dozing*) You *are* interested in the movement, aren't you?

DRUDGE. Yus.

GIRL. I knew you were. (*she returns to the telephone*) What? I'll ask her. Mr. Wellington wants to know if you are married—

DRUDGE. Not up to now.

GIRL. And how many children you've got—but of course —hm! passing on to next cage (*she rings off violently and crosses to the* DRUDGE) Mr. Wellington has sent me a letter which he says I am to read to you.

DRUDGE. Life's so lonely—carn't 'e give me a vote? I sort of feel I could 'ug it.

GIRL. (*getting really quite disappointed in her*) I don't think you quite realise what the vote means to a woman.

CLERK. (*looking up*) What does it, Miss Elizabeth?

GIRL. It means so much that I couldn't possibly explain it.

The CLERK *sighs and again resumes his labours. The office bell rings, and he rises and goes out.*

GIRL. (*muses*) What can he mean by sending me this note. I'll—(*she goes to telephone, irresolute*) No, I won't—yes, I will. (*and she rings*) 132 Central. (*she gets it*) Yes, yes, Reggie? Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Farrow, is that you? —Oh yes, my father is quite well, thank you. I thought I was talking to Mr. Wellington. Yes, father says you were quite right about the drains—"yielding the line to a younger man"—not at all, I merely wanted to—(*shortly*) Oh, that you Reggie? No, I'm not fussing. (*the* CLERK *comes in*

with note) Oh, your note's just come—I—(*a long pause*) Cut off. (*she puts down the telephone in disgust and takes note from the* CLERK *then turns sweetly to the* DRUDGE) Don't you hate the telephone? He's at one end and I'm at the other, it's—ugh!!!

DRUDGE. I never 'ad a 'e.

GIRL. I've got to read this aloud to you—you don't mind, I promised. (*the* DRUDGE *wearily acquiesces, and the* GIRL *opens the note and begins*) "Elizabeth," that's me. No "dear" or anything, just "Elizabeth," shortly, how odd. "Tell your lady friend to get hold of a good fellow and marry him."

DRUDGE. (*brightens considerably*) 'Ear, 'ear!

GIRL. "Tell her to go home and have a fine large family and bring 'em up to be defenders of the Empire."

DRUDGE. 'E talks sense—I'm with 'im.

GIRL. "As for you, Elizabeth"—(*she turns and beams on the* DRUDGE) He's talking about *me* now——

DRUDGE. 'E do chat, don't 'e?

GIRL. "I have been made junior partner this morning, so we can be married in a fortnight." (*she squeals a little squeal, then controls herself and resumes reading, hurriedly*) "I can't take you to the meeting to-night, I'm too busy, but I *could* spend the entire evening with you if you are likely to be at home—we can be married Thursday week. Telephone reply. Reginald Wellington." (*she flies to the telephone*) 132 Central, please. Hullo! Hullo! who's that?—I want Mr. Wellington.—He's *out*? No, no! Who are you?—"His clerk." "He's gone to the bar for a sandwich." I thought they went there for a brief—follow him—find him out wherever he is—tell him I shall be at home—at *home*—my gracious me (*loudly*) I shall be *at home* the *entire* evening. Who am I? Oh, what a fool the man is—all clerks are—I beg your pardon, Mr. Faldew.

CLERK. Don't mention it, Miss Elizabeth.

(*She wheels back to the telephone*)

GIRL. I—I, Miss Nanson shall be at home the *entire* evening—tell him at once I shall be at home *all* the evening—got that—good! (*she replaces the telephone and sinks into chair exhausted*) Oh dear, the telephone makes me get hot all over. (*there is a pause—after which she turns sweetly to the* CLERK) I hope I haven't interrupted you, Mr. Mildew.

CLERK. Not at all

GIRL. But father doesn't mind my using it when he isn't here and it is useful, isn't it? Thursday week, isn't it wonderful? (*she wakes out of her dream and rustles around*)

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